An Investigation of Personalised Learning Approaches used by Schools

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research team is grateful for the contribution of the staff, pupils and parents of the schools involved in the case studies. They gave up their time with enthusiasm and interest. The contribution made by the school staff completing the questionnaire is also acknowledged. It is hoped that all those who contributed feel that their effort was worthwhile and ultimately will benefit pupils. The team are also grateful for the valuable input from the Steering Group and the DfES staff.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The research investigated the personalised learning approaches used by schools and was conducted by the universities of Sussex, Cambridge and the London Institute of Education, on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). It took as its starting point the DfES’s description of personalised learning broken down into the five components of:

- assessment for learning;
- effective teaching and learning;
- curriculum entitlement and choice;
- school organisation; and
- beyond the classroom.

The literature review identified very little research which has evaluated the implementation of the whole of personalised learning as defined by the DfES above. A few studies have been undertaken in North America, and some useful insights into the effective implementation of personalised learning in schools in England are given in work by Hargreaves (2006), Rudduck et al. (2005) and Leadbeater (2005). These reports suggested that personalised learning was characterised by high levels of participation of pupils and staff in the schools, learning to learn and pupil voice. Personalised learning is described in this literature as an ongoing process which enables ‘deep learning’, (meaning that the underlying values inform the practice), rather than simply the acquisition of a few skills.

Key Findings

The key findings are reported under the research questions provided in the specification for the research.

• What approaches are schools using to personalise learning for pupils?

A wide range of approaches to personalised learning is being adopted in schools. In both the case studies and survey, respondents clarified that they saw the personalised learning approaches as endorsing current activities or providing a means to further develop existing ones. Activities most likely to have been introduced specifically with the aim of personalising learning included reorganisation of teaching assistants, learning mentors and administrative staff to provide more flexible support to individual pupils and small groups and extending alternative curricular pathways and work-related provision to increase opportunities for all pupils at Key Stages 4 and 5.

• How well do these approaches reflect the five key components?

The five key components of personalised learning were all evident, though not usually with equal emphasis in the same school. The case study schools tended to have clear and well-articulated aims around all pupils’ learning which they saw as facilitated by the five key components. Assessment for learning and effective teaching and learning were often seen as means of achieving higher standards for all and better post school outcomes, with curriculum entitlement and choice, school organisation and beyond the classroom activities providing the support for this to happen.
• What are the key features of best practice in personalised learning that could be shared?

Key features emerged from the case studies and survey that seem to characterise schools developing strong and cohesive personalised learning approaches. These included aspects of assessment for learning in particular, pupils taking more responsibility for their own learning, ‘genuine’ pupil voice which was embedded across all five areas of personalised learning, strong links with the community and curricular flexibility. There is scope for greater sharing of practice between special and mainstream schools in interdisciplinary teamwork since this has been well established in special schools over a long period of time. The implications of the ‘remodelling’ agenda for mainstream schools mean that teachers increasingly find themselves working with other adults, which for many is not reflected in either their training or experience. The experience of special schools could be recognised and developed as a resource in this area to support their mainstream colleagues.

• Are there any aspects of personalising pupils’ learning where schools would value additional support?

Competing interests were seen as limiting personalised learning approaches, for example, the expansion of work-related opportunities with the pressure on GCSE results. The case study schools sometimes successfully overcame this challenge by showing how broadening the curriculum re-engaged pupils who were disaffected, who then went on to gain some core traditional qualifications.

• How are schools tailoring teaching and learning to meet the needs of specific groups of pupils (e.g., gifted and talented, minority ethnic pupils, low attaining)?

Schools were targeting gifted and talented pupils as well as those ‘falling behind’ by extending curricular provision and through the effective deployment of teaching assistants and, in some schools, learning mentors. However, senior managers and teachers in both the case studies and survey repeatedly reported concerns about whether it might make vulnerable ‘the invisible’ pupils attaining in the middle range. This was recognised and subject to monitoring in some schools.

Methodology

The research involved a literature review, survey of primary, secondary and special schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and in-depth case studies of thirteen schools identified as having effective practice across the five components of personalised learning. The case study schools were selected by nomination, self-referral or on the basis of evidence from sources such as their websites, in all cases verified through initial contact. The case studies provided in-depth descriptions of schools in which approaches to personalised learning were relatively well-developed. Factors which facilitated or limited these developments were identified, described and the approaches taken by schools to overcome them are reported. The survey had a limited response, but the 347 schools completing the questionnaire provided a broader overview of approaches in those schools likely to be most engaged in personalised learning.

Other findings
Case study schools using personalised learning were characterised by a clear vision, well and often articulated, which they used to provide a cohesive approach that integrates initiatives, and in some cases and specifically for personalised learning, integrates approaches across the five areas. The study identified a number of issues for further consideration including:

- the need for greater clarity and expanded policy guidance of the personalised learning policy in relation to primary schools;
- potential tension between targeting those pupils seen as in greatest need (often defined as those with special educational needs (SEN) and those identified as gifted and talented) and progressing inclusivity; and
- role of individualised provision within personalised learning.
1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Aims of the Research

This report presents the findings of research which investigated the personalised learning approaches used by schools. The research was carried out by the Universities of Sussex, Cambridge and the London Institute of Education, funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). It took as its starting point the five components of personalised learning described in existing policy documents. These were:

• assessment for learning (AfL);
• effective teaching and learning (including grouping and ICT);
• curriculum entitlement and choice;
• school organisation (e.g. workforce remodelling); and
• beyond the classroom (e.g. extended schools).

The research was not intended to evaluate the national implementation of personalised learning as an approach, but rather to describe effective practice so that it could be more widely shared. The research also aimed to identify facilitators and barriers to the development of personalised learning to inform future policy and practice.

The specification for the research stated that the project should address five key questions:

• What approaches are schools using to personalise learning for pupils?
• How well do these approaches reflect the five key components?
• What are the key features of best practice in personalised learning that could be shared?
• Are there any aspects of personalising pupil’s learning where schools would value additional support?
• How are schools tailoring teaching and learning to meet the needs of specific groups of pupils (e.g., gifted and talented, minority ethnic pupils, low attaining)?

The research involved a literature review, survey of primary, secondary and special schools and in-depth case studies of thirteen schools identified as having effective practice across the five components of personalised learning. This provided an overview of school perspectives and clarified ways in which schools are developing personalised learning, linking it to other initiatives and existing developments and extending and enriching their current practice.

1.2 The Policy Context

In 2004, the Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners (DfES, 2004b) emphasised effective classroom practice through assessment for learning and the use of a range of teaching styles that promote personalised learning. The role of ICT was recognised as providing a greater range of classroom and school resources, and for the capacity to electronically mark and analyse work undertaken by pupils, enabling systematic feedback on learning and thereby on teaching. Misunderstandings and difficulties arising in saved work were noted to provide the basis for discussion between teacher and pupil and the subsequent reflection on teaching that is central to assessment for learning. The strategy emphasised teacher development, in particular, recognising the role of classroom observation, coaching and mentoring. In this way, the strategy
acknowledged that personalising learning for pupils, may be enhanced through ensuring that teacher development is personalised.

The White Paper **Higher Standards, Better Schools For All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils**, (HMSO, 2005a) set out the future agenda for personalised learning. It further developed the aims of *Every Child Matters*, by promoting Children’s Trusts to bring together all those who provide services for children and families in each local area, improve the quality and flexibility of provision using extended schools to give all children access to extra support in areas where they have a particular interest or aptitude. It reiterated the aim of widening curriculum choice in secondary education, so that more young people are motivated by learning opportunities which interest and stretch them.

This was further supported in the *14-19 Education and Skills* White Paper (HMSO, 2005b) which proposed reform of post 14 curriculum and qualifications with a stated aim of ensuring all pupils benefit from the style and pace of learning that suits them. The foundations for this greater flexibility needed to be provided at Key Stage 3 and some schools were piloting a two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum and more flexible test/examination entry times to achieve this. This would benefit from greater flexibility in curricular requirements, so the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has reviewed the Key Stage 3 curriculum to make more time for schools to provide enrichment for pupils designated gifted and talented and better support for others identified as needing it. These developments are supported by the aim to have 14-19 partnerships operating in every part of the country, offering greater curriculum choice to pupils in their areas.

These messages were endorsed in the review and further development of the strategy *The Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners: Maintaining the Excellent Progress* (DfES, 2006a). In this document, five priorities were identified by the government for the next phase of implementation. These were:

- closing the gap in educational attainment between those from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers;
- continuing to raise standards for all across the education system;
- increasing the proportion of young people staying on in education or training beyond the age of 16;
- reducing the number of young people on a path to failure in adult life;
- closing the skills gap at all levels – from basic literacy and numeracy to postgraduate research – to keep pace with the challenge of globalisation.

(DfES, 2006a, p.2)

The complexity of addressing these problems and the overlap between them is acknowledged in the strategy. Personalised learning approaches can contribute to each of these priorities as the examples from schools in this report will demonstrate, though attributing any progress directly to personalised learning is limited by the range of activities in which these schools are involved. The strategy acknowledged that disadvantaged children with a given level of attainment are less likely to make progress than their more advantaged peers with the same prior attainment. The key contribution to learning made by parents and carers was noted and the need to raise expectations recognised. Personalised learning strategies are used by schools to target disadvantage by, for example, increasing participation in learning, bringing greater coherence to support from external services through extended schools and providing a more flexible range of curricular and work-related opportunities that encourage engagement in learning beyond 16 and potentially contribute to closing the skills gap.
The next phase of the Five Year Strategy emphasised the importance of putting users’ experience at the heart of the provision. It noted that this is not the same as simply responding to user demand, nor is it sufficient to allow those users best able to express their needs to determine the services. Every Child Matters and the Children Act 2004 provided the commitment to the central role of users and the subsequent extensive developments in integrating children’s services are attempting to meet this challenge. Personalised learning, more flexible 14 -19 qualifications and provision, the development of the children’s centres and extended schools in the 10 Year Childcare Strategy and the Childcare Act 2006, have all pointed to ways forward in realising this. These programmes are reconfiguring services across traditional boundaries to create provision that is shaped around the user’s needs.

The policy on personalised learning is supported by considerable investment. The White Paper Higher Standards, Better Schools For All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils (HMSO, 2005a) committed an additional £500 million in 05-06 to support the development of personalised learning, with a further £490 million in 06-07. Although funding was allocated to all schools, these resources were targeted in particular at schools with the highest number of low attaining pupils and those in deprived areas. It also gave a commitment to ensuring that every school has high speed internet access by December 2006. The Primary and Secondary National Strategies are providing support for schools to personalise learning, for example through the CD The Learning Conversation (DfES, 2006b). Over 70% of schools now select Assessment for Learning from the National Strategies’ suite of whole school initiatives.

Increased focus on personalised learning resulted from the independent review of teaching and learning ‘2020 Vision’ chaired by Christine Gilbert (Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group, 2006) which was tasked to look beyond the reforms set out in the 14-19 and Schools White Papers. This review sets out a vision of the education system for 5-16 year-olds in 2020 and what changes would be considered necessary in order the achieve that vision. The review consulted across a wide range of partners across the education system, including the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Ofsted and the Teacher Development Agency, as well as professional bodies, research and higher education institutions, educational experts and local practitioners. The review group also took into account information based on quantitative data, interviews, seminars, surveys, research and a call for evidence in reaching its findings and recommendations.

The report considered ways to improve and sustain the rate of pupil progress, strategies to enhance teachers’ skills and share best practice, how to engage pupils and parents in the learning process, ways in which curriculum flexibilities might support personalised learning, and how to establish a better system of innovation in teaching and learning in schools. The Department will be using the recommendations of the review to inform future policy development.

1.3 Literature review

Electronic and hand searches were conducted using the terms ‘personalised learning’ and ‘personalisation’. Nearly 200 references were retrieved through the Australian Education Index, British Education Index, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and EBSCO Research Databases. Nearly all the references to personalised learning were commentary rather than empirical research, highlighting that there are limited studies providing evaluative data on personalised learning. Hence, this literature review draws on commentaries as well as research and provides a brief
summary of some of the research in each of the five components, rather than literature only addressing personalised learning as an overall concept.

Evidence of the impact of personalised learning

Some research addresses personalised learning within the context of broader school improvement programmes. For example, Herlihy & Kemple (2004) report on the impact of The Talent Development Middle School Model in Philadelphia aimed at school improvement in struggling urban middle schools. Part of the whole-school reform model involved school-level structural changes intended to create more personalised learning environments for pupils and teachers. Talent Development had a positive effect on eighth grade (equivalent to Year 7) mathematics achievement and modest impact on attendance rates. The impact on reading and on seventh grade pupils was not significant.

Evidence is necessarily limited, at this stage, of the direct impact of practices identified as personalised learning on raising standards or improving the outcomes identified in Every Child Matters and reiterated in the White Paper, Higher Standards, Better Schools for All. That is, being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well being. However, looking at earlier versions of personalised learning in North America provides some limited evidence of its impact on raising standards. The Centre for Collaborative Education (2001) provides strong evidence that the 11 Boston Pilot Schools that were providing personalised education raised standards significantly higher than other schools. They reported higher test scores at elementary, middle and high school level, better attendance rates, lower suspension rates (equivalent to fixed term exclusions in England), lower grade retention rates and higher graduation rates than other schools in the Boston Public School System. However, personalised learning was only one dimension of this initiative and attributing the improvement to this is difficult when the schools also had greater autonomy and flexibility over their resources, tended to be smaller in size and have more active parental involvement.

Similarly, Jenkins and Keefe (2002), reported positive evidence that two high schools in which personalised learning was implemented achieved higher test scores than the others in their districts. Furthermore, external evaluators reported pupils taking more responsibility for their own learning and benefiting from more targeted teacher feedback, both strong features of assessment for learning. These authors drew on the work of Darling-Hammond (1993), stressing the need for all pupils to learn at high levels and seeing instruction as enabling diverse learners to construct their own knowledge and to develop their talents in effective ways. Teaching should be contingent on what learners do and teachers should give learners as much autonomy as possible while they are making good progress but offer increasing degrees of help when they experience difficulties. Du Boulay and Luckin (2001) review studies that explore the degree to which different learners make best use of the help that is available. Central to this concept of contingent teaching is the ongoing process during the lesson of improvisation or ‘structured tinkering’ which Eyre (2002) describes (in relation to pupils identified as gifted and talented) in response to self reflection and evaluation by the teacher.

No such specific evidence is available in an English context as yet. The survey of teachers in England undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research for the General Teaching Council (Sturman et al., 2005) noted that the aspect of personalised learning most frequently encouraged in schools was the use of evidence
to identify pupils’ progress in learning (reported by 90 per cent of teachers in the survey). Other commonly reported factors relevant to personalised learning (reported by over 80 per cent in each case) were being encouraged to get to know pupils well, to offer pastoral care, to accommodate individual learning needs, and to give feedback designed to enable pupils to make learning choices. Primary teachers were more likely than secondary teachers to be encouraged to develop partnerships with the home, the community and relevant welfare agencies, whereas secondary teachers were more likely than primary teachers to identify extended schools status and new building design as important for the successful implementation of personalised learning.

One publication informed by practice in England is Leadbeater’s (2005) *The Shape of Things to Come* in which he draws on visits to six schools and five local authorities to explore approaches to personalised learning. The schools selected were recommended by other schools and local authorities and appear to be those engaging actively in developing personalised learning. He concludes that where personalised learning takes place, schools have found different ways of organising themselves, often through collaboration with other schools or agencies outside school, which provides greater flexibility and adaptability in the provision offered to pupils.

Rudduck et al., (2005) worked in seven self-selected East Sussex secondary schools supporting their developments on personalised learning and concluded that teachers were challenged by personalised learning approaches to consider teaching and learning from a pupil perspective. The centrality of pupil voice came through the work and led schools to construct their improvement plans around pupils’ concerns.

A larger group of schools, involved in the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, provided perspectives for Hargreaves’s (2004a & b; 2005a, b & c; 2006) six pamphlets on personalised learning. These included accounts of conferences of headteachers working on personalised learning and helpful examples are given of practice in schools. Hargreaves presents nine gateways through which personalised learning is approached: curriculum, learning to learn, workforce development, assessment for learning, school organisation and design, new technologies, pupil voice, advice and guidance and mentoring and coaching. In the sixth publication Hargreaves (2006) outlined how pupil voice, assessment for learning and learning to learn can all be seen as contributing to *deep learning*, consisting of the capacity to learn, control over learning and competencies (in contrast to repetition of facts). The curriculum and new technologies enrich the experience of learning, enabling *deep learning* to be embedded in *deep experience* and advice, guidance, mentoring and coaching provide the *deep support* demanded. This provides a helpful analysis that emphasises that personalised learning is not a set of techniques but rather a culture that supports learning and makes use of these nine gateways to do so.

Fielding (2006) argues that the personalised learning agenda is disguising what is essentially another form of control. He argues that the focus on performance is demeaning and unlikely to produce the kinds of results intended. Similarly to Hargreaves (2006), he suggests that transformation, not traditional school improvement, should be the aim and that this can be better realised through a person-centred leadership and management approach that encourages knowledge creation and networking, rather than control.

Stronger evidence of the impact of personalised learning on attainment can be identified by drawing on the research relating to each of the five components of personalised learning described earlier.

**Assessment for learning**
Assessment for learning might be assumed to be one of the best developed components of personalised learning since the evidence base to support it has been established for longer and it is more extensively embedded in the Government’s National Strategies than some of the other elements. A review of assessment for learning by Black and Wiliam synthesised evidence from 250 studies. Their findings published in 1998 in ‘Inside the Black Box’ concluded that an assessment for learning programme could raise pupil achievement by as much as 2 GCSE grades. Gains were noted to be more substantial for lower achieving pupils.

In a further study (Black et al., 2003) of Key Stage 3 teachers and pupils in mathematics and science in Medway and Oxfordshire, pupils made significant gains in attainment. The effect size was significant in terms of raising performance in the secondary schools. The teachers in this study reported using the techniques of higher order questioning, comment marking, identifying clear targets for improvement, self-assessment, peer assessment, analysing and devising mark schemes and using feedback from tests. They noted that all pupils’ work improved and those regarded as higher ability produced outstanding work. Pupils appreciated time given to resolving misunderstandings and reported greater emphasis on understanding work and identifying future targets. Pupils were able to analyse and devise their own mark schemes and undertake marking of each others’ end of unit tests.

The evaluation of the KS3 strategy pilot (Stoll et al., 2003) highlighted the contribution of assessment for learning to improvements in teaching and learning. For example, the researchers reported evidence that teachers were incorporating assessment for learning techniques (p.76-7) and making better use of data from pupils to plan for progression (p.34). Year 8 pupils reported that assessing their own work helped them to learn (p.67).

James et al., (2006) reporting on the largest research project to date on assessment for learning in England, noted that in the 40 primary and secondary schools involved, it was difficult to move teachers on from reliance on specific techniques such as sharing success criteria, to practices based on deep principles. Long-term change in these practices was noted to require teachers to re-evaluate their beliefs about learning, the way they structure tasks and the nature of their classroom roles and relationships. Sharing and evaluating changes in classroom practice through professional development opportunities supported teachers in achieving this. Pupil attitudes showed a decline in engagement with learning as years increased from primary to secondary, confirming findings from earlier studies.

Gardner (2005) provides an overview of research on assessment for learning in which powerful effects are demonstrated across a range of international contexts, providing some updating of the evidence base. Drawing on practice in schools, Hargreaves (2006) reports that among participants, (mainly headteachers who were self-selected), 40% attending the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust conferences rated assessment for learning as the most developed aspect of personalised learning in their schools. However, despite this focus on assessment for learning, it is still regularly rated by Ofsted as being poorly developed within schools.

Effective teaching and learning
Most of the literature on personalised learning makes some reference to putting the learner at the heart of the process, enabling pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning and shaping the provision to the learner. There is considerable evidence on various aspects of the personalised learning component on effective teaching and learning. A recent DfES research review and case studies (Kutnick et al., 2005; 2006) reported on enhanced teaching and learning through providing training in group work for pupils and teachers.

Personalised learning approaches tend to emphasise learning styles, sometimes linking this to multiple intelligences.¹ Both Adey et al. (1999) and Coffield et al. (2004) provide compelling evidence to challenge the basis of these approaches though they acknowledge the need to be selective and cautious, since some approaches were found to be more reliable than others and increased motivation. Coffield et al.'s (2004, p.56) critical review of learning styles and their implications for pedagogy concluded:

_Some of the best known and commercially successful instruments² have such low reliability, poor validity and negligible impact on pedagogy that we recommend that their use in research and in practice should be discontinued....others emerged from our rigorous evaluation with fewer defects and deserve to be researched further_

This suggests that schools focusing on learning styles in personalised learning approaches should be aware of their limitations and be selective about which they use, so that benefits from the initial motivating effects can be capitalised upon.

A systematic review (Eppi English Group, 2003) on the impact of ICT on literacy in English noted that many of the studies on ICT focused on pupils with special educational needs rather than on the majority of learners. The review highlighted that ICT is changing the teachers’ role from instructor to facilitator but not reducing the contact as such. Lewin et al., (2003) identified innovative practice using ICT to link home and school and its potential for enhancing learning. They noted a shift in teaching and learning practices with more self-directed learning, greater flexibility and autonomy for pupils and improved communication between home and school. Here, the teaching and learning component links to that focusing on beyond the classroom issues.

**Curriculum entitlement and choice**

Munn et al. (2004) in Scotland, in a national consultation exercise on education issues involving teachers, parents, pupils and others, found that in relation to curriculum reform, the need for flexibility, choice, relevance and meeting individual needs were identified. In particular, greater flexibility from 14 years of age was viewed as fit for purpose for life beyond school. Rules relating to the age at which pupils could take national examinations were seen as too prescriptive. All these are aspects of a personalised learning approach through curriculum entitlement and choice.

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¹ Theory developed by Howard Gardner, suggesting that the traditional notion of intelligence, based on I.Q. testing, is far too limited and proposing eight different intelligences to account for a broader range of human potential.

In England, the initiation of the National Strategies’ two-year Key Stage 3 pilot project in 2003 provided an opportunity for many schools to consider creating curricular flexibility that would release time. It was designed to increase the pace of learning and improve the decreasing motivation of pupils in Key Stage 3. The evaluation of the first pupils to have this experience was undertaken by Ofsted in 2005 and concluded that a condensed Key Stage 3 was not suitable for all schools, or all pupils in the same school, but could increase the pace of learning more effectively in English and mathematics than in science. The curricular flexibility created by the scheme enabled many schools to start and complete GCSEs early and to offer a broader range of choices in Year 9 and beyond. The most effective examples were characterised by lessons in which pupils were given greater responsibility for their learning and those in which higher order questioning was used to encourage pupils to think and justify their opinions.3

Curriculum entitlement and choice within personalised learning approaches has been found to increase young people’s engagement in learning. The Increased Flexibility Programme (14-19), which provides vocational learning opportunities through partnerships between schools and colleges, was evaluated by O’Donnell et al., (2006). They concluded that most young people involved were making sufficient progress to achieve their qualifications. Both staff and the young people themselves, reported increased confidence and that they were more prepared for working life through developing both sector-specific skills and those needed for general employability. The majority planned to remain in learning. The challenges identified included continuing competition between the schools and colleges and the difficulties in engaging employers.

School organisation

School organisation can contribute to increasing attainment outcomes in a number of ways including through staffing, pedagogy or ethos. The focus in approaches to personalised learning has been on staffing structures, though the research specifically addressing this is relatively limited.

Size of school has been linked to personalised learning in the literature. In the US, Davidson (2002) interviewed staff and pupils in seven small high schools and concluded that the schools were characterised by the presence of varied forms of small learning communities, personalised learning plans, learner-centred assessment and out-of-school learning experiences. Research on large schools undertaken by Allen (2002) in the US, described the provision of more personalised learning environments for pupils in large high schools (defined as 1,000 or more pupils) using homebases, small academies and what in England would be referred to as schools-within-schools. While these two pieces of research appear to contradict one another, the creation of schools-within-schools in larger schools, could be seen as mimicking the learning environment of that found in smaller schools. An example of this model in England is described by Mike Davies (2005), the principal of Bishops Park College, Clacton. He suggests that what is being provided is a more profound approach to personalised learning. For example, he describes the curricular entitlement and choice as:

The conventional timetable operates within a team of 5/6 teachers, with no teacher working with more than 85-90 students. Team theme involves a cross

3 An independent evaluation of the pilot by LSE/NFER has recently taken place and is due for publication in Spring 2007
Master-classes are day long workshops with an ‘expert teacher’ and Faculty comprises groups of 3/4 teachers from cognate areas working together. In addition to the above, the College Day allows for small learning group tutorials, with 4/5 students meeting with teacher and assistant for weekly review of work and target setting, lunchtime clubs for all, with students choosing from a menu and staying with a club for 10 x 40 min sessions. (Davies, 2005, p.115)

Research on school transition and transfer (Galton et al., 2003) suggested that schools focusing on the pedagogical aspects of school transfer are in a better position to achieve higher attainment outcomes than those predominantly concerned with pastoral or organisational aspects. Expectations of the teaching and learning process need to be clarified and each year group needs to be given increased responsibility for their own learning and to develop an identity unique to that year, so the pupils have a clear sense of purpose and worth. This provides an example of what might be termed ‘group personalisation’.

**Beyond the school**

The fifth component of personalised learning, relating to activity beyond the school is informed by evidence from a range of sources. The national evaluation of full service extended schools (Cummings et al., 2005), suggested that while robust evidence was not yet available, there were examples of raised attainment, increased pupil engagement with learning and growing trust and support between families and schools. An earlier study (Webb & Vulliamy, 2004) funded by the Home Office, demonstrated improved attendance and a reduction in exclusions (proxies for subsequent raising of standards), when social workers were introduced in a small number of schools. These studies, along with other reviews of extended schools (e.g. Wilkin et al, 2003), suggest that it might be possible to link initiatives in developing services beyond the classroom to standards and/or ECM outcomes.

If personalised learning is about raising aspirations and tackling barriers to learning, the links with parents and the community are key components. Networking with other schools and with organisations in the local community has been an approach taken by some schools, though this is not likely to be enough in itself to bring about change. It is the nature of the collaboration involved that seems to determine whether school collaboration with parents and carers, other schools and the local community, has a positive impact on learning and longer term engagement with learning. To be effective, collaboration needs resources, leadership, shared direction, ownership and responsibility.

The literature review demonstrates that personalised learning as a whole is a relatively sparsely researched area. However, there is more substantial evidence for the five components that constitute personalised learning.

**Definition of personalised learning**

The current research took as its starting point the definition of personalised learning provided by David Miliband MP during his role at the time as Minister for Schools, in his 2004 speech to the North of England Conference:
This definition reiterated high expectations for every child, emphasising the facilitative role of teachers and schools. More recently, the DfES has reiterated the notion of shaping teaching, referring to this as ‘tailoring’. It has also added the tackling of barriers to learning as a key aim within this agenda. The DfES Personalised Learning website defines a personalised approach to supporting children as being:

...about tailoring education to individual need, interest and aptitude so as to ensure that every pupil achieves and reaches the highest standards possible, notwithstanding their background or circumstances, and right across the spectrum of achievement.

Leadbeater (2004; 2005) has characterised ‘personalisation’ in terms of participation. He argues that rather than focusing exclusively on service providers attempting to improve the service, personalised learning offers a real opportunity for learners to participate fully, becoming co-producers in decisions about the supply and public value of education. In this way, personalised learning links very closely to the ‘pupil voice’ research (e.g. Fielding, 2004a; 2004b; Fielding and Bragg, 2003; Rudduck & Flutter, 2003; Rudduck et al, 2005), since it is the process of strengthening pupil voice in the school that increases their capacity to participate in decision-making.

The precise terminology is also an issue in defining personalised learning. Hargreaves (2006) refers to ‘personalising’ learning rather than ‘personalised’ learning, emphasising that this is a process not a state or product. Many writers refer to both personalised learning and personalisation. The latter is the term more often used to describe personalising public services in general, whereas schools more often refer to personalised learning, which justified its use in this report.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The empirical component of this research involved two strands, a survey of schools and thirteen case studies.

2.1 The Survey

The purpose of the survey was to provide a wider context for the thirteen case studies through an overview of how personalised learning was being interpreted across the school sector. The questions focused on what respondents thought personalised learning was about and what they had specifically introduced in response to the personalised learning agenda.

A ten per cent (1,800) sample of primary schools and 20 per cent sample of secondary schools (739), special schools (208) and Pupil Referral Units (91) were drawn by the National Foundation for Educational Research on behalf of the researchers. All 31 Academies were included. The samples were stratified by school size and region. The total number of schools in the sample was 2838.

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4 http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/personalisedlearning/

5 A copy of the questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.
The questionnaire was sent to the headteacher or principal of each school. A second mailing was sent to non-respondents and followed up by phone calls and/or e-mail. Three hundred and sixty two schools responded. The main reasons given for not filling in the questionnaire was ‘lack of time’ and being ‘too busy’ or ‘cannot do any more paper work’.

Of the 362 schools that responded 13 (six primary and seven secondary schools) said that they did not want to fill in the questionnaire or sent it back blank. These have not been included in the analysis; two schools (one primary and one special school) sent back the questionnaire after coding was complete and analysis had started so they were also omitted. For the purposes of the analysis, 347 completed, or partially completed questionnaires were included giving a response rate of 12.8 per cent. However, analysis of the characteristics of the respondents demonstrated that they were broadly nationally representative on phase/type, geographical location, socio-economic grouping of intake and ethnicity. Nevertheless, the reporting of the survey findings can only be tentative or indicative of those 347 schools, likely to be more interested or active in approaches to personalised learning.

Table 1: Number and percentage of replies in each phase/type of school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Replies by type number(%)</th>
<th>% of replies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>182 (10)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>129 (17)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>40 (19)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRU</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>11 (12)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 Case Studies

The case studies were undertaken to collect a more detailed picture of practice. It also allowed issues to be explored from different perspectives for example, those of pupils, senior managers and teaching assistants. Thirteen case studies were undertaken: five primary, five secondary, one middle deemed secondary and two special schools. Three schools were part of the same pyramid to enable issues of transition to be explored.

Schools were selected using pre-agreed criteria, as follows:

- Range of phases - primary, secondary & special, geographical spread, socio-economic circumstances and urban/rural location;
- Over-publicised or over-researched schools were avoided;
- Schools that had a clear vision of how they were personalising learning - as stated in policy documents or through other channels;
- Practice appeared interesting/effective in some way in each of the five components, though unlikely to be evenly so;

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6 Schools were defined by ‘type’ e.g. ‘infant’, ‘first’, ‘primary’, ‘junior’ etc. There were 13 different categories depending on the age of pupils on roll. In some cases the numbers in each type were very small so it was not appropriate to split the file by ‘type’. The general categories of ‘primary’, ‘secondary’, ‘special’, and ‘PRU’ were used in the analysis with the usual definition of Middle 8 -12 deemed ‘primary’ and Middle 9 -13 deemed ‘secondary’.
• Schools appeared to be progressing both in terms of pupil outcomes academically/cognitively and affectively (this might relate to evidence of them removing barriers to learning);
• Schools had monitoring and evaluation data that related to personalised learning that they were willing to share e.g. progress of particular groups of pupils;
• Schools that wanted to be involved.

The data collected included:

- analysis of documentation;
- interviews with managers, teachers, teaching assistants;
- interviews (group) with pupils;
- interviews with parents/governors; and
- lesson/activity observation.

A summary of each case study is presented in section 47.

2.3 Limitations of the methodology

The response rate to the postal survey was disappointing but was broadly representative of the larger sample. Responses appear to be skewed towards schools that had considered/reflected on the personalisation agenda, and that may have introduced new initiatives addressing personalised learning. However, it is important to avoid generalising from the findings to all schools. The data are presented as numbers of schools as well as percentages where appropriate, in order to reiterate this point.

Describing practice in schools from a short visit has the potential to generate misleading data. Collecting multiple interviews, observation and documentary data potentially enable both reliability and validity to be increased but schools are complex organisations and understanding their dynamics requires intensive and prolonged engagement. However, this was not an evaluation as such and schools were encouraged to ‘showcase’ practice that they considered to best illustrate their work on personalised learning. Furthermore, differences in practices within schools, particularly across large secondary schools, are enormous. So, the findings are explicitly examples of activities that schools wanted us to see and which in their opinion best illustrate personalised learning. Hence, what is described and analysed in this report is the schools’ own perspectives on what constitutes ‘best practice’ in personalised learning, mediated by observation, interrogation and judgements involved in the research process.

There are inevitable difficulties in attributing specific findings to personalised learning. The researchers therefore sought to gain the perspectives of those involved in the school on changes experienced within personalised learning approaches, describe the schools’ general trajectories from their perspective and the main themes that emerge that might enable both policy and practice to develop in the future.

3. SCHOOLS’ APPROACHES TO PERSONALISED LEARNING

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7 Quotations, references to case study findings and examples given elsewhere in this report have not been attributed to named schools to protect the confidentiality of individuals, except in the case of the boxed examples
In this section, the findings from both the case studies and the survey are presented, initially describing schools approaches in each of the five areas, followed by some themes that emerged from the data. The findings from the survey should be treated as indicative rather than as representative of all schools.

3.1 Definitions of Personalised Learning

Schools were invited to indicate which statements drawn from the DfES and other definitions of personalised learning do or do not reflect what personalised learning means in their school (see questionnaire in the appendix). For example, ‘pupil choice’, ‘assessment for learning’, ‘new roles for a range of staff’.

The research found that there was widespread uncertainty as to what was meant by ‘personalised learning’, in both the case studies and survey, though this was often welcomed as a stimulus for debate or an opportunity for schools’ own development. The definitions adopted, or in some cases developed by schools, were wide ranging. Some schools regarded this as a constraint:

*Personalised learning does not seem to be clearly defined and seems to mean different things at different times. It would be good to have a clear definition to work from.* (Questionnaire, primary)

However, others felt that having one definition would restrict their current activities. They suggested that it was helpful to have an overarching concept, within which to group sometimes disparate initiatives that they were already pursuing such as redefining the roles of administrative staff with teaching and learning initiatives.

The case study schools tended to emphasise curricular flexibility, pupil voice, school organisation and beyond the school in their descriptions:

*It is about what the child feels possible for itself - that lies out in the community, not just the school*  
(Secondary case study, teacher in charge, gifted and talented)

More than 270 schools responding in the survey agreed the following were included in their definition of personalised learning:

- Assessment for learning/ Learning to learn;
- Every pupil fulfilling potential/differentiation;
- Inclusion;
- Every child matters (ECM);
- Flexible curriculum; and
- Pupil voice/ learners’ ownership of learning.

Some of the schools in the survey gave examples of the key components in personalised learning that they were addressing:

- **maximum choice minimum compulsion at KS4** – of constructing options from free choice rather than blocks or pathways;
- **Individual targets known and understood by the child**;

(Questionnaire, secondary)

Others saw personalised learning more as providing a cultural context in the school and less about specific approaches:
Personalised learning isn’t an isolated issue implemented by a series of actions. It is a way of thinking about objectives and functions of a school..... we haven’t done anything just to support the personalised learning, but we’ve done lots of things which improve learning and give students more choice, ownership and support. (Questionnaire, secondary)

Personalised learning is not a bolt on initiative it needs to be part of long term strategy and fundamental philosophy of learning/education. (Questionnaire, primary)

All our children are valued as individuals which is I believe, the absolute foundation of personalised learning (Questionnaire, primary)

Referring to personalised learning as a philosophy or way of working, rather than as specific policies or resources, emerged strongly from the case studies, with schools often referring to the importance of attitudes and values in taking a personalised learning approach:

...it’s a very complex process that’s around a value system. It’s about mutual respect, whether you’re talking to adults or children. And it’s around believing in people’s capability and that’s not something that you can just take away and introduce in a staff meeting. (Primary case study interview, senior manager)

In most schools in both the survey and case studies, personalised learning was defined in relation to existing activities being extended. The policy legitimised current activities and supported future developments:

We therefore do not see personalised learning as a separate initiative but as a way of making sense of current school developments (Questionnaire, primary)

This ‘re-badging’ of established and developing practice reflects two issues: how far the activities described within the five areas of personalised learning are already established in schools and whether the label ‘personalised learning’ was used to discuss these practices:

Personalised learning is not a phrase used in school – I would suggest most of my colleagues wouldn’t be able to describe personalised learning. (Questionnaire, special)

I also feel that we have been working on several initiatives that I have commented on in this questionnaire for a while but we did not label them as personalised learning before now. (Questionnaire, secondary)

Less often in the case study schools, new activities were described specifically in response to the personalised learning agenda, but as the data from the survey reported under each of the five areas suggest, the number of schools who noted this was small. Several schools in the survey gave examples relating to personalising learning across year transition or school transfer, for example:

Key Stage 1/2 staff to work/plan/teach together – aiding professional development and giving a clear idea of where children are going and where they’ve come from to the respective teachers. (Questionnaire, primary)

3.2 Impact of personalised learning on attainment
It was not possible to demonstrate a direct causal relationship between levels of attainment and reported impact of personalised learning in either the case studies or the survey. However, schools were largely positive about the impact of personalised learning initiatives on pupil attainment. Schools surveyed were asked ‘What impact have these initiatives had (or show potential to have) on raising standards in pupil attainment?’ There were asked to state what evidence of impact, if any, they had.

Figure 1: What impact have the initiatives you have introduced had on raising standards in pupil attainment?

While it appears that initiatives have had least impact on standards of attainment in PRUs the differences between the types of school were not significant (though the small number of PRUs included in the sample makes it difficult to test statistically). Examples were provided in both the survey and the case studies:

*Disaffected (pupils) at KS4 with personalised programme obtain some qualifications. Option subjects generally have much higher positive residuals (value added).* (Questionnaire, secondary)

*Flexible curriculum & alternative accreditation with well-supported work experience have had significant impact on attainment* (Questionnaire, special)

*We have two learning mentors. They are not teachers, they work full time and they will engage in work with vulnerable children who are at risk of school refusal through disaffection or through genuine emotionally based school refusal. ...We had a young man last year who had quite a serious drug problem and he was violent and he was a clear risk of permanent exclusion. We managed to meet his needs by having him coming in for two days a week. Now he only came in for three hours on one day and two hours on another day, and the learning mentors worked with him, through the youth club and this is useful provision. So he didn’t actually come into our school buildings, because that was a risk, but he came down the youth club. .....most importantly he’s achieved an entry-level certificate of English and a certificate in maths, so he’s actually*
School staff were asked in the survey and case studies which initiatives within personalised learning had contributed to the greatest impact on attainment. Across all types of school, assessment for learning in particular, target setting, pupil tracking and in primary schools, self and peer assessment were the most frequently mentioned. Learning styles, thinking skills and in special schools, individual programmes were mentioned by five schools. In the area of curricular choice, vocational/alternative pathways and flexibility were reported by a few secondary schools to have contributed most to attainment, whereas primary schools mentioned small group targeted intervention strategies such as ‘catch up’ and booster classes.

Schools surveyed were asked to indicate the impact of any personalised learning initiatives on engaging or re-engaging pupils with their learning.

**Figure 2:** What impact have personalised learning initiatives had on pupil (re-)engagement with learning?

Schools were largely positive about the impact of personalised learning initiatives on engagement and no significant differences between school types were noted.

When asked which particular initiatives within personalised learning had most effect on re-engaging pupils, the findings were similar to those noted in relation to attainment. However, 35 per cent of schools that completed the survey did not respond to this question. Aspects of assessment for learning were mentioned by ten schools across the school types and self and peer assessment and individual target setting were in particular, mentioned by primary schools. Aspects of effective teaching and learning and curricular choice mentioned are similar to those listed in relation to pupil attainment except that four primary schools mentioned enrichment and one special school listed apprenticeships. The other main difference was that mentoring was mentioned by all types of schools as having contributed to re-engagement.

### 3.3 Priority given to personalised learning
Schools in the survey were asked about the priority given to personalised learning at the present time. Three hundred and twenty-five schools reported giving personalised learning at least medium priority.

Table 2: What priority is your school giving to personalised learning at the present time?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primary schools and PRUs that responded to the survey gave significantly less of a priority to it than secondary or special schools, raising a question about the relevance of some of the components to them.

Figure 3: What priority is your school giving to personalised learning at this time?

When asked ‘Do you expect this priority to change during the next academic year?’, no school expected personalised learning to become less of a priority. Just under half of the schools expected it to become more of a priority, with primary and special schools less likely to suggest this than secondary schools.

This finding suggests that it might have been mainly schools that had already committed some resources and time to personalised learning who responded to the questionnaire. It is unknown from the small sample in this survey, how far this reflects the national picture but the difficulties in getting schools to respond both to the initial questionnaire and follow ups, might be taken as an indicator that those who responded were more positive and were doing more. The finding that primary schools gave it less priority, may suggest why response rates were lower for these schools in the survey.

3.4 Staff Development
A common characteristic of the case study schools was their commitment to personalised learning for staff. Many of these schools carried over the same principles that were implemented in classrooms, into their staff development activities such as interactive teaching, open-ended learning challenges, individual feedback (often through peer observation of lessons) and teamwork.

*It really is the ethos of the school that it's a learning community and everybody is involved. And all of the learning is celebrated. We've just had one of our bilingual support workers who became an higher level teaching assistant at the beginning of the year and went to pick up her/his certificate yesterday, so at assembly tomorrow s/he'll be presented with it in front of the school. And [Support worker B] just completed a GCSE this year in maths. We have another two members of staff going on to do a degree who are support workers here. So whilst we expect children obviously to learn, that's what they're here for, it's the whole community.* (Primary case study interview, senior manager)

Most (253) schools who responded in the survey, replied positively to the question ‘Has your school allocated resources for staff training on issues specifically related to personalised learning?’ Sixty-four of the schools which replied also listed ‘other’ time allocated to development relating to personalised learning, including activities focusing on teaching pupils identified as gifted and talented, curricular changes and thinking skills. These schools specified various activities such as training for teaching assistants and involvement in local authority-wide working parties on aspects of personalised learning such as assessment for learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Number (%) of schools stating ‘yes’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INSET days</td>
<td>198 (57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/department meetings</td>
<td>184 (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMT agenda items</td>
<td>180 (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working party</td>
<td>55 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for individual teachers</td>
<td>135 (39)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: many schools listed more than one type

### 3.5 Assessment for learning

In the case study schools, assessment for learning was not, as far as the observations suggested, consistently embedded across the schools in most cases. Often, this was acknowledged by senior managers:

*And what we really need to do is to share the good practice that’s in each department so that everybody has a bigger repertoire available to them, because some subjects are very good at using one particular aspect of it, but not the rest. ...And I think that’s the way we are at the moment, that peer assessment is very well developed in [Subject C] and in [Subject D], but less so across other subject areas. Whereas in other subject areas, there’s much greater emphasis on monitoring targets and progress. So it’s really a question of embedding good practice.* (Secondary case study interview, senior manager)

There were however, some excellent examples. In one primary case study school, a senior manager described the classroom practice:
They’re being taught how to question, if they don’t understand something, instead of just not understanding and keeping quiet about it, they’re now personally being given those tools to be able to stop, understand that they’re here to learn, understand that it’s OK to ask questions, understand that it’s OK and good to make mistakes so that the climate within school is that if a child puts their hand up and makes a mistake they’re not laughed at, it’s normal practice.

In the same school, the teacher described the way in which self assessment using photography and ICT feeds into pupil profiles as records of their achievements, though does not provide an indication of why the piece of work was considered good:

...it’s the children who decide, ‘This is a good piece of work’, or ‘That person has done a good piece of work’. We have a thing called the golden book of achievement in Resource Provision and we take a photograph and we make a certificate. Then what they did is recorded so that we can look back and say, ‘Do you remember at that point you did that, and now look at you, you can do this.’ So through the golden book, they can see how they’ve progressed. I would want the children to begin to use the scanners to scan the work into their own profile, to take photographs of things that they’ve done or the work that they’re doing with other children, and to put those into their own file.....And make decisions for themselves on what is good and what is not so good. (Primary case study interview, teacher)

Schools surveyed were asked about the assessment for learning initiatives that reflected their school’s philosophy towards personalised learning.

Table 4: Which assessment for learning initiatives reflect your school’s philosophy towards personalised learning and which have been adopted specifically as a result of the personalised learning agenda?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>freq (%) Yes</th>
<th>freq (%) no opinion</th>
<th>freq (%) No</th>
<th>freq (%) specifically for PL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>academic tracking</td>
<td>282 (81)</td>
<td>52 (15)</td>
<td>13 (4)</td>
<td>45 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual target setting</td>
<td>319 (92)</td>
<td>22 (6)</td>
<td>6 (2)</td>
<td>66 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual feedback</td>
<td>325 (94)</td>
<td>22 (6)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>62 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self &amp; peer assessment</td>
<td>300 (86)</td>
<td>42 (12)</td>
<td>5 (2)</td>
<td>76 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prior &amp; outside school learning acknowledged</td>
<td>234 (67)</td>
<td>102 (29)</td>
<td>11 (4)</td>
<td>49 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assessment by ICT</td>
<td>155 (45)</td>
<td>154 (44)</td>
<td>38 (11)</td>
<td>24 (7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were significant differences between primary/secondary and special/PRUs on whether they considered self and peer assessment to reflect their schools’ philosophy to personalised learning, with special schools and PRUs much less likely to do so. However, only half of primary and special schools claimed to have already implemented it (prior to a specific personalised learning policy), whereas over two thirds of secondary schools and only one third of PRUs reported having done so. Special schools were significantly more likely to report having specifically introduced academic tracking, individual target setting, individual feedback and self and peer assessment in response to the personalised learning agenda. It appears that while
special schools are less likely to report self and peer assessment as reflecting their philosophy towards personalised learning, they were more likely to have introduced it specifically in response to the increased emphasis on it in the national agenda. There were no significant differences between types of school specifically introducing acknowledgement of prior learning and assessment using ICT. Primary schools were more likely to report that prior learning and learning outside school reflected their school philosophy.

3.6 Effective teaching and learning

In the middle school case study, cross-curricular work involving collaborative teaching benefited from blocks of time off timetable when single subjects did not have to be taught separately, at the start and end of terms. Open-ended learning challenges (in which a problem is presented to solve in a meaningful context, tools and resources are provided and learners encouraged to take more responsibility for learning than in traditional, teacher-led tasks), also occurred during the normal timetable. Integrated and collaborative work was not confined to these special days and weeks when the normal timetable was suspended. The following was a notable example, focused, in the first instance, on the use of ICT control technology linked to science.

Saxmundham Middle School: Integrating the components of personalised learning through pupils setting up a company

......a whole term of the Year 8 work is based on setting up a (horticultural) company. It draws together all of their ICT skills which they’ve learned in the first three years in the middle school. I become the bank manager and they have to apply to me for a loan by a PowerPoint presentation and by email submission with a business plan. They then have to do market research on who would buy what plants and how much they would be prepared to pay for them, and how the plants would grow, when they would be sold and so on. They produce the business cards, the letterheads, spread sheets. They do the web design for their company and so on. And the individualisation of it is that they are actually working as companies. They divide themselves up into (jobs): they decide amongst themselves who’ve got the particular skills in those areas. And they do that themselves.

Obviously they grow their plants; they control the greenhouse which is part of our ICT thing via the internet actually…. They look at the conditions … for growth. They sell the plants and they actually make real money at the end of it. And the bank money gets paid back, hopefully. The profit they share that out. It’s an incredible motivator. We’ve had children here in class until 7 o’clock in the evening and they’re supposed to be home at five. …..We say you’ve got £5 start up capital…..We had one boy who really, really didn’t want to do the work. So he found other companies that could do the work, so … for 15% outsourcing … and he was going to do nothing but organise other people to do the business stuff for him and set up contracts. This is all off their own backs……towards the end, he changed the contract: changed the small print on his copy of it. This got the others really up in arms about it, so you go through all issues of litigation. All of that came in. It was amazing. (Middle school case study interview, teacher)

This example illustrates how an expanded curriculum has integrated the five components of personalised learning. It has encouraged both staff and pupils to assess their individual strengths and weaknesses and build on these towards
improved outcomes, which is the essence of assessment for learning. It has fundamentally changed the relationship between teachers and learners. The familiar organisation of schools in terms of timetables, subject divisions, and locations has been challenged. Boundaries have been crossed: between teachers and learners, between subjects, between the vocational and the academic, between school and community. Above all, the learning has been in a setting transferable to the real world.

Schools that reported more extensive implementation of personalised learning strategies often mentioned ‘experimentation’ in teaching and learning techniques. For example, in one secondary case study school, an advanced skills teacher has had the opportunity to develop a suite of computer programs using visual stimuli in the form of photographs of nearby towns, villages and the countryside as well as people and artefacts to promote individual writing. An example in English would be story writing, say about a street and its shops, in MFL it would be to choose a local town and to write a tourist information guide in French or Spanish. The principle is that pupils are given choice of genre and can use their imagination to make it their own; as a senior manager explained the best pieces are from those who have used the program and gone off on a really unusual tangent but lower ability pupils can also be supported with vocabulary and writing frames.

Where experimentation was most developed it was accompanied by effective staff development through peer observation:

*The school has a ‘teaching and learning group’ looking at learning styles and strategies and encouraging (teacher) peer observation and helping teachers to be brave and try something new. e.g. Drama used in a recent maths lesson after the maths teacher had observed use of drama in a humanities lesson.*

(Questionnaire, secondary)

In several of the case study schools, pupils were involved explicitly in evaluating teaching and providing teachers with their feedback. Discussions about what had gone well were a feature of the last part of lessons in these schools and the evidence from teachers’ planning showed that pupil feedback influenced subsequent teaching methods and coverage. In one primary case study school, pupils assessed the learning potential being offered by a local museum:

*I asked the children to go on the trip and they went and evaluated the museum. They went for a typical morning and then in the afternoon we put them into groups and they evaluated positives and negatives of their experience and what they’d like to see improved. Each group prepared a speech for the museum staff, curator and management of the museum to listen to. And it was extremely powerful stuff. Because they started to think, ‘There’s the objects in the case, why can’t we have another replica object outside the case so we can handle them and touch and feel?’ ‘Very good idea.’ ‘Why can’t we have clearer labels? Why can’t we make the millers talk less long? I want to hear the mill, I want to touch the grain. Why can’t we see the grain go down here?’ All these things that the museum staff had never thought of, because they’re evaluated by adults for adult provision.* (Primary case study interview, senior manager)

This example illustrates how feedback on teaching and learning can be a key component of pupils taking more responsibility for their own learning. Choice within lessons sometimes reflecting preferred learning styles was another area of practice noted in the case study schools. In the middle school case study the discussion with Year 6 pupils illustrates this:
Interviewer: What sorts of things can you get to choose?

Pupil 1: ….he can set two pieces of work and then you can say whichever you prefer. You still learn the same amount …

Interviewer: But then do you find some pupils who, say, I don’t like writing. If you’re always given the choice of being able to draw a picture, how do you then improve your writing? We are all put off doing things we don’t like.

Pupil 1: He doesn’t stand for it. He says, if you’re in bottom English group and you struggle with it, then draw pictures but try and put one word or two words. But if he knows you can write and read, he won’t stand for it.

Pupil 2: He’s just brilliant; we get so much choice. But it’s not about having too much choice – I don’t think it is.

(Middle school case study group interview, Year 6 pupils)

Schools were asked about the teaching and learning initiatives that reflect their school’s philosophy towards personalised learning.

Table 5: Which teaching and learning initiatives reflect your school’s philosophy towards personalised learning and which of these approaches has been introduced specifically in response to the personalised learning agenda?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>most classes grouped by ability</td>
<td>144(41)</td>
<td>127(37)</td>
<td>76(22)</td>
<td>14 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching to preferred learning styles</td>
<td>229(66)</td>
<td>104(30)</td>
<td>14 (4)</td>
<td>62 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pupils learning &amp; talking together</td>
<td>307(88)</td>
<td>40(12)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>55 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many open-ended learning challenges</td>
<td>241(69)</td>
<td>103(30)</td>
<td>3(1)</td>
<td>59 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pupil autonomy &amp; choices encouraged</td>
<td>222(64)</td>
<td>116(33)</td>
<td>9 (3)</td>
<td>55 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interactive whole-class teaching</td>
<td>272(78)</td>
<td>74(21)</td>
<td>1 (&lt;1)</td>
<td>31 (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fewer than half the schools suggested that ability grouping reflected their school’s philosophy to personalised learning whereas over two thirds of schools suggested that each of the other approaches relating to effective teaching and learning did so.

Overall, secondary schools were significantly more likely than primary or special schools to suggest that ability grouping reflected their school’s philosophy to personalised learning with more than 60 schools (54% of the secondary schools) in the survey reporting that ‘most classes grouped by ability’ reflects their school’s philosophy.

Figure 4: Does ability grouping reflect your schools’ approach to personalised learning?
However, within the case-studies, only one of the five secondary schools cited mixed-ability organisation within its English department as a defining aspect of their approach to ‘personalised learning’ and suggested higher attainment in this area resulted from this. Primary schools in the survey were more likely to report that preferred learning styles and group work reflected their school’s philosophy to personalised learning. Special schools in the survey were more likely to suggest grouping by ‘need’ (such as support for communication, mobility or behaviour) rather than by ‘ability’.

Another aspect of effective teaching and learning within personalised learning is pupils taking more responsibility for their own learning. Pupil-led learning was a feature of some of the case study schools. In a primary case study school, a senior manager commented:

…..they are very much student led in terms of the learning and in terms of the projects. This one that they’re doing at the moment is based around film. So they’ve been doing some videoing that’s completely what they’ve wanted to do in terms of the videoing, in terms of the film that they’ve made, I think it’s an advert that they’ve actually decided to do. They’ve directed it, they’ve done the planning for it and they’re going to be doing the editing of it as well. (Primary case study school interview, senior manager)

For some of the case study schools, the emphasis within the area of teaching and learning was on pupils learning and talking together:

Benhall St Mary’s First School: Pupils learning and talking together through philosophy sessions
The school’s involvement in ‘philosophy sessions’ for children are a distinctive feature of the school. Teachers from this school and others in the pyramid (both in Saxmundham Middle and in Leiston High) have had a training session with Robert Fisher from Brunel University (Fisher, 2003) and some, including the head and a teaching assistant who was observed teaching such a session have undergone a training course for ‘Philosophy For Children’ (P4C) at Montclare University in the USA.

The philosophy session that was observed was with a trained teaching assistant (referred to as ‘the teacher’ for this session) taking Years 3 and 4 while their new class teacher observed. The children and teacher sat in a circle. The teacher reminded the class of the rules about allowing others to speak and then read a passage of text that the children could follow from their own A3 photocopy. From the text children asked questions that were recorded on the board – during this they could ‘answer’ factual questions but could not give an ‘opinion’. At the end, the children voted for the question they wanted to focus on. During the session the researcher was particularly struck by children aged 7 to 9 using the construction “I disagree with X when she said ….” and by the fact that the teacher intervened less and less so that by the end children were actually in discussion with each other.

Four children from this Year 3 and 4 lesson were interviewed about what they felt they got from these sessions:

…it teaches you not to be shy and teaches you to talk to different people not yourself all the time.
[It] teaches you how to learn, to hear each other and not talk over each other and to listen.
they [teachers] just let us speak and they don’t know what we’re going to come up with.

The children also talked about ‘transferable’ skills to say maths:

…it’s still joined up […] somebody said the question then another person says ‘how did you work that out?’ It’s still doing it
Yeah.. they take it into the lesson afterwards

They also discussed learning more social skills:

You learn how to play with each other out in the playground ‘cos that’s learning. You learn how to be nice to each other and play nice games

Overall, this work seemed to be contributing to several areas of learning, though the debriefing session would need to reflect upon the relative effectiveness of the arguments used to demonstrate the learning. It was not without its challenges. The teacher suggested that these sessions were an opportunity to challenge attitudes from home e.g. “is the aeroplane pilot a man or a woman?” “should rich people mix with poor people?” The headteacher talked of the role of the teacher being that of ‘facilitator’. The teacher ‘guided’ the discussion while recognising that these sessions had to be the children’s own agenda.

3.7 Curriculum entitlement and choice
Many schools in both the survey and case studies considered curricular flexibility as one of the most important aspects of personalised learning. For secondary, special schools and PRUs, this often meant more flexible subject options or learning outside school:

*School has adopted a two-year Key Stage 3 which has enabled a flexible personalised curriculum to be developed in Key Stage 4 – in the middle of this initiative, so difficult to be certain on outcomes, but Key Stage 3 results and anecdotal evidence strongly positive. Learning diaries and other initiatives linked to this in attempt to personalise the learning.* (Questionnaire, secondary)

In Years 12-13, the increased flexibility was claimed to be facilitating personalised learning:

**Leiston High School, Suffolk: Personalised learning through curricular flexibility in Key Stage 5**

The Head of Business Studies at Leiston High School argued that the Applied A-Level, compared to the more ‘traditional’ one offers more opportunities for personalised learning:

*It’s far more accessible to the students. It’s also a different way of teaching – more in tune with their lifestyles and their future lifestyle and working lives. The assessment of it is much more accessible – they see where they are going.*

His own philosophy towards personalised learning and his role as a teacher within his subject was summed up by:

*How I see personalised learning – it’s for the individual to develop their skills and to develop their learning of that subject and it’s for the teacher to develop strategies for that individual student.......I’m a facilitator, an enabler. I teach my students to learn my subject rather than teach them directly.*

He also argued that, within the vocational courses, there was more choice in terms of not only what pupils do but also how they do it. He noted:

*As a teacher this needs a change of approach often with the pupils themselves determining the nature of the discussions and how lessons went. Teachers have to give up control.....*

The pupils themselves regarded their portfolio of work as something they felt proud of and could be taken to interview either at college or work. They agreed that they were more engaged with business studies and its different approach. Comparing it to their other more traditional A Levels one pupil remarked:

*you can control what you do and how much research you need to do …sometimes you get research type [work]… the rest of it is drummed straight into you.*

For primary and special schools in particular, curricular flexibility was more likely to be seen as an opportunity to broaden out from the major time allocation on English and mathematics to a more flexible and creative curricular provision.
The best thing to come from the initiative is to give schools the assurance that they can move away from the rigidity of the last few years and re-introduce creativity and flexibility. (Questionnaire, special)

Only occasionally did schools in the survey mention specific subject differences, though the case studies specifically interrogated this question:

Finding it easier to personalise History and Geography topics in Year 6 I have tried to change the focus of the curriculum. Children are happier and it does have a lasting effect. (Questionnaire, middle)

Many of the qualities of personalised learning are evident particularly in the arts strands and in our students’ experience of performance in art. (Questionnaire, secondary)

Schools were asked about the curriculum entitlement and choice initiatives that reflect their school’s philosophy towards personalised learning.

Table 6: Which curriculum entitlement and choice initiatives reflect your school’s philosophy towards personalised learning and which have been adopted specifically as a result of the personalised learning agenda?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Yes freq (%)</th>
<th>No opinion freq (%)</th>
<th>No freq (%)</th>
<th>Specifically for PL freq (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alternative pathways</td>
<td>177 (51)</td>
<td>150 (43)</td>
<td>20 (6)</td>
<td>59 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gifted &amp; talented programmes</td>
<td>246 (71)</td>
<td>83 (24)</td>
<td>18 (5)</td>
<td>49 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>targeted interventions (eg. catch up, booster)</td>
<td>307 (88)</td>
<td>30 (9)</td>
<td>10 (3)</td>
<td>59 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>topic days / weeks</td>
<td>248 (71)</td>
<td>83 (24)</td>
<td>16 (5)</td>
<td>42 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enrichment &amp; extension for all</td>
<td>266 (77)</td>
<td>77 (22)</td>
<td>4 (1)</td>
<td>49 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocational, work-related &amp; real world</td>
<td>185 (53)</td>
<td>141 (41)</td>
<td>21 (6)</td>
<td>40 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pupil choice within the curriculum</td>
<td>199 (57)</td>
<td>134 (39)</td>
<td>14 (4)</td>
<td>40 (11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schools most frequently reported targeted curricular interventions such as ‘catch up’, booster classes or withdrawal as reflecting their school’s philosophy towards personalised learning. Alternative pathways and vocational and work-related were least likely to be reported as reflecting the school’s philosophy, possibly because for the 175 primary schools who responded, these curricular initiatives may be less relevant. This is supported by the analysis by school type of responses on alternative pathways:
Figure 5: Do alternative pathways reflect your school’s philosophy towards personalised learning?

There are highly significant differences between primary and secondary but no significant differences between secondary and special on whether alternative pathways reflect their philosophy towards personalised learning; with primary schools being least likely to endorse this initiative. Special schools that are either all-age or secondary-aged, have a well-established tradition of offering alternative pathways, such as accreditation for life skills programmes and pursuing curricular objectives through activities outside school.

There were fewer differences between school type on whether targeted initiatives such as catch up, booster classes or withdrawal reflect the school’s philosophy towards personalised learning though secondary schools were significantly more likely to suggest this than special schools. Special schools may be less likely to see these specific interventions as necessary, since the entire curriculum is more likely to be organised along similar lines to that viewed as a specific intervention in a secondary school.

**Gifted and talented and enrichment and extension**

There were highly significant differences between types of school on both gifted and talented provision and enrichment and extension for all. The differences in gifted and talented provision between primary and secondary schools and between secondary and special schools were both highly significant, with secondary schools being most likely to report that gifted and talented programmes reflected their school’s philosophy towards personalised learning. The initiative appeared not to be relevant to PRUs.

On enrichment and extension for all, there are highly significant differences between primary and secondary but no significant differences between secondary and special schools; in contrast to gifted and talented programmes, primary schools were most likely to endorse this initiative.
Figure 6: A comparison of phase/type of schools associating personalised learning with gifted and talented provision and those associating personalised learning with enrichment and extension.

When asked in the survey about the initiatives actually implemented and at which Key Stage, it appears that schools are less likely to make specific gifted and talented provision for children until Key Stage 2, possibly because schools are reticent about ‘labelling’ a child too early:
Table 7: Gifted and talented provision implemented by Key Stage and phase/type of school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Gifted &amp; Talented programmes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>primary</td>
<td>Not implemented</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implemented in All KSs</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implemented Just KS2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>Not implemented</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implemented All KS</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>special</td>
<td>Not implemented</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implemented All KS</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRU</td>
<td>Not implemented</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whereas for enrichment and extension, primary schools were much more likely to have implemented approaches at both Key Stages:

Table 8: Enrichment and extension provision implemented by Key Stage and phase/type of school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Enrichment and extension for all</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>primary</td>
<td>Not implemented</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implemented All KS</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>Not implemented</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implemented All KS</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>special</td>
<td>Not implemented</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implemented All KS</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRU</td>
<td>Not implemented</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implemented All KS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.8 School Organisation

Activities in the school organisation component of personalised learning emerged (in particular from the case studies) as more likely to be related to workforce remodelling than to other aspects. Many schools in both the survey and case studies described aspects of staffing restructuring to facilitate personalised learning:

Millom School, Cumbria: Supporting all learners through creative staffing structures

At Millom School in an ex-mining area of Cumbria, peer group pressure and parents’ own experience of schooling were considered to have been contributing to low performance. Staff teams have been created which break down traditional barriers between teaching and ‘non-teaching’ staff. The Heads of Year were replaced by a Directors of Learning Team. This included the appointment of a Director of Student Support who was not a teacher but came from an Education Welfare background. This brought together the work of the learning mentors, special educational needs support, guidance and enrichment. Two learning mentors who are not teachers are well-established members of the local community and as such, have successfully liaised with families in the community to increase attendance significantly. They also support identified learners to overcome barriers to learning. Five administrative staff and a receptionist undertake tasks that used to occupy valuable teacher time such as checking attendance, providing examination support, running the website and organising cover for absent staff. This restructuring has enabled teachers to focus on learning, and has provided the impetus for other areas of personalised learning.

Providing support for pupils who are making insufficient progress, was one theme in the approaches to restructuring in many of the case study schools, often through the appointment of learning mentors who have helped schools achieve a flexibility of approach that plays to the strengths of its staff and furthers some very precisely identified aims in terms of personalised learning.

One case study school employs two learning mentors, both teaching assistants, who are registered on the national training scheme, to engage in work with vulnerable pupils who are at risk of school refusal through disaffection or emotional difficulties. Workforce remodelling has helped the school achieve a flexible approach that plays to the strengths of its staff and furthers some very precisely identified aims in terms of personalised learning. The fact that the learning mentors have direct access to the curriculum was reported to be critical to their success as it enables them to provide personalised learning opportunities flexibly and spontaneously. They have set up a Learning Zone in which they run a small group, twice a week, for 3-4 pupils at the end of Year 10 who are not making progress. The pupil, learning mentor, parent and head of year all sign that they are committed to this pupil attending the Learning Zone. It personalises learning by giving pupils greater control over their own learning in a ‘safe’ environment. The mentors noted that they have to get the pupils into the door of the school to start with, before they can begin to start working with them.

In other schools, the restructuring has integrated what were traditionally the academic and pastoral roles:

In line with workforce reform, we are moving to a new structure in Sept 06 – teams of staff will have both academic and pastoral responsibility for a group of
students of mixed years. We see this as generating more autonomy for staff and students ‘the school within a school’. (Questionnaire, secondary)

We have created two middle management teams as part of workforce remodelling this year: personalised learning and Every Child Matters. This replaces the previous heads of Faculty and heads of year teams. This has pushed personalised learning into the heart of our planning – it is now a major theme in our improvement plan. It avoids personalised learning being seen as an initiative and gives us room to have lots of issues together in a coherent framework. (Questionnaire, secondary)

This issue of linking developments, in this case personalised learning and the workforce remodelling arising from the Every Child Matters agenda, seems to be important in enabling schools to progress. The case study schools were characterised by having developed coherence across initiatives, which enabled them to see national policies as opportunities rather than overload. So, for example:

So you’ve got the Assessment for Learning agenda. You’ve got the Pupil Voice agenda which people are having to subscribe to because it’s on their self-evaluation form. And then in a very much smaller way, there’s the whole agenda that we’re trying to pursue, the Learning Without Limits agenda that says, do we need to label our children anyway? And actually that is growing and there is a groundswell there where people are beginning to say, ‘Tests aren’t the measure of our children’. And I don’t see a conflict between any of those. I actually think there’s a real way (of using personalised learning to) bring those three agendas together. (Primary case study interview, senior manager)

Schools surveyed were asked about the school organisation initiatives that reflect their school’s philosophy towards personalised learning.

Table 9: Which school organisation initiatives reflect your school’s philosophy towards personalised learning and which have been adopted specifically as a result of the personalised learning agenda?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
<th>freq (%) specifically for PL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>new roles for support staff</td>
<td>250 (72)</td>
<td>86 (25)</td>
<td>11 (3)</td>
<td>72 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher given time to personalise learning</td>
<td>169 (49)</td>
<td>165 (47)</td>
<td>13 (4)</td>
<td>45 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>virtual schooling - ICT linking home &amp; school</td>
<td>105 (30)</td>
<td>207 (60)</td>
<td>35 (10)</td>
<td>35 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behaviour management</td>
<td>213 (61)</td>
<td>121 (35)</td>
<td>13 (4)</td>
<td>28 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distributed leadership</td>
<td>236 (68)</td>
<td>101 (29)</td>
<td>10 (3)</td>
<td>31 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pupils representation in policy making</td>
<td>220 (63)</td>
<td>112 (32)</td>
<td>15 (5)</td>
<td>42 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pupil-owned places &amp; spaces in school</td>
<td>105 (30)</td>
<td>217 (63)</td>
<td>25 (7)</td>
<td>21 (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New roles for support staff, which emerged in the case studies as part of the remodelling of the workforce agenda, appeared to be the most likely aspect of school organisation seen as reflecting the school’s philosophy towards personalised learning. Around two thirds of schools responding listed behaviour management, distributed leadership and pupil representation in policy-making. Fewer than a third suggested use of ICT to link home and school and pupil-owned spaces in school. Some commented on lack of ICT access in pupils’ or teachers’ homes though this may reflect lack of awareness about sources of funding for teachers’ laptops.8

Significant differences between phases/types of schools were noted on teacher time to personalise. Special schools were more likely to report this as reflecting the school’s philosophy towards personalised learning. Special schools and PRUs were more likely to report that behaviour management reflected their philosophy towards personalised learning. Secondary schools were significantly more likely to endorse use of ICT to link home and school.

**North Doncaster Technology College: Use of ICT to support learning at home and school**

At North Doncaster Technology College, lessons are edited on to a DVD to enable pupils to revisit, revise, catch up or enrich their learning.

*So every Year 7 lesson, every Year 8 lesson, every Year 9, 10 and 11 and 12 all that would be on the DVD that all children get. So they can accelerate themselves or go over things again. So that for example, when the Year 8 tests come, at the end of Year 8, they might want to look back at some of the Year 7 topics and do it that way. It's a brilliant idea and it's fantastic, especially either for low ability children who need to go over things again or for high ability children who would like to accelerate on something else. They don’t need the Internet – they do need a computer though to run it. You can run the DVD on play stations too, though, and most kids have play stations*

(Enrichment co-ordinator)

*So the CD; we originally wanted students to be able to access resources from home and just link straight onto it. Then it became apparent that some parts of it were more relevant that others so we thought we could actually tailor it and take the best parts out and put it on a CD. This year it actually went to a DVD for the first time because it was too much information just for a CD. The next DVD's going to be coming out between Christmas and Easter and then we have lessons and tutor times when they learn how to use it. (Personalised Learning Co-ordinator)*

(Secondary case study interviews)

### 3.9 Beyond the classroom

The aspects of personalised learning that are promoted through activities beyond the classroom provide important contextual support for classroom learning. Research suggests that many of the barriers to learning experienced by pupils stem from aspects of their life outside school or are aggravated by low aspirations of the family and/or community. Findings from the case studies provided excellent examples of

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8 Funding for laptops is provided by the DfES as part of Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) and therefore depends on local authority priorities
activities involving parents and the local community which begin to address these challenging issues.

Wroxham Primary School, Potters Bar, where the pupils teach the parents

The researcher participated in a session run by the children, for the parents. These are the researcher’s observations:

For the morning, the children are the teachers and the adults the children. My surrogate parent explains to me that usually on a Monday they can choose who to sit with and where. ....it’s off into the playground for a quick session of Barnyard. Some parents clearly find the idea of baaa-ing like sheep with their eyes shut in order to find kindred sheep quite challenging. There are hidden mutters of, ‘I’m a sheep, what are you?’ before we start, just in case they are made to look foolish in front of their children but soon everyone gets into the swing and there is a feeling of relief as inhibitions dissipate. Then it’s back to the classroom for an hour long carefully structured and beautifully presented session on Thinking Caps, devised and delivered by the Year 5 children....

Then a lucid introduction to Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences by one of the Governors. The rest of the morning is spent on activities devised entirely by the Year 5 children for their parents relating to each of the intelligences. Like the children routinely would, we simply choose which ones we want to do and the order we want to do them in. ....we are invited to reflect on why we might make our choices and what the point of the various activities might be for us as individuals. We also are set up for how to self-assess.
(Primary case study observation)

Schools were asked about the beyond the school initiatives that reflect their school’s philosophy towards personalised learning.

Table 10: Which beyond the school initiatives reflect your school’s philosophy towards personalised learning and which have been adopted specifically as a result of the personalised learning agenda?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>partnership with parents &amp; community</td>
<td>319 (92)</td>
<td>27 (8)</td>
<td>1 (&lt;1)</td>
<td>31 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working with other education institutions</td>
<td>310 (89)</td>
<td>34 (10)</td>
<td>3 (1)</td>
<td>49 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>links with other countries</td>
<td>167 (48)</td>
<td>169 (49)</td>
<td>11 (3)</td>
<td>17 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the extended school</td>
<td>263 (76)</td>
<td>80 (23)</td>
<td>4 (1)</td>
<td>40 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>links with local businesses</td>
<td>188 (54)</td>
<td>150 (43)</td>
<td>9 (3)</td>
<td>24 (7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nearly all the schools in the survey mentioned partnerships with parents and the community and 310 listed working with other educational institutions. Since the numbers of schools responding positively to this question are higher than many of those in the other five areas of personalised learning, it suggests a strong focus on partnership beyond the school.

Working with other educational institutions was seen by nearly 90 per cent of schools in the survey as part of their philosophy towards personalised learning. For secondary schools, this often included arrangements with other institutions to broaden the range of subjects that could be offered, for example at A-level. This sometimes led to complications in timetabling:

*Co-ordinating timetables with different institutions to provide a wider range of learning pathways is a constraint.* (Questionnaire, secondary)

Figure 7: Do links with businesses reflect your school’s philosophy towards personalised learning?

The only major difference between types of schools on partnership beyond the school was on links with businesses which perhaps unsurprisingly, was least likely in primary schools.

### 3.10 Personal and Social Development

This component was added by the research team to the survey and case studies to the five others as defined by the DfES as it was felt that the existing five did not bring out these aspects sufficiently explicitly. As in all the statements listed, there can be a difference in understanding and what the statement means in each individual school; ‘mentoring’ is one such term that the researchers felt could mean academic mentoring but equally well could mean a holistic approach.

Pupil choice was evident in some case study schools across a range of spheres. For example, in the middle school case study a prominent area of pupil choice was in
relation to extra-curricular activities of which this school has many - sports, music, French, chess, Eco-School, ICT etc.

The importance of attitudes of staff and pupils as a barometer of school ethos emerges from both the survey and the case studies, in embedding personalised learning in practice. These attitudes are often reflected in the respective views held about ‘behaviour’ and ‘learning’. Some schools are using the personalised learning agenda to set out clear expectations in an attempt to maximise engagement and learning and thereby minimise the need to ‘manage behaviour’:

A particularly interesting initiative might be our banning of the term ‘disaffection’ in favour of the concept of maintaining allegiance to mainstream education (in a positive sense rather than a planning for failure). Students have maps which are based on computerised assessments of emotional intelligence and other needs. (Questionnaire, secondary)

One of the primary case study schools similarly decided to bring about a shift in culture in the attitudes towards the relationship between behaviour and learning:

....within school we had a positive behaviour policy, but just to use the word behaviour with children automatically gives a negative connotation and a lot of children were living up to that. So, I wanted to get rid of that word altogether and replace it with learning. When you asked a child prior to us doing that, why they came to school, they came to school to behave well - well, no! .......You come to school because you want to learn. And if you ask the children now why they come to school, they’ll tell you it’s because they want to learn. And that brought a much calmer atmosphere onto the whole school and made the climate for learning for every child in the school much more accessible and open. (Primary case study interview, senior manager)

Schools were asked about the personal and social development initiatives that reflect their school’s philosophy towards personalised learning.

**Table 11:** Which personal and social development initiatives reflect your school’s philosophy towards personalised learning and which have been adopted specifically as a result of the personalised learning agenda?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
<th>freq (%)</th>
<th>specifically for PL %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>no opinion</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mentoring</td>
<td>269 (77)</td>
<td>72 (21)</td>
<td>6 (2)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advice and guidance</td>
<td>268 (77)</td>
<td>77 (22)</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>counselling services</td>
<td>217 (63)</td>
<td>125 (36)</td>
<td>5 (1)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pupil clubs</td>
<td>255 (74)</td>
<td>87 (25)</td>
<td>5 (1)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school council</td>
<td>308 (89)</td>
<td>36 (10)</td>
<td>3 (1)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus on PL in PSHE</td>
<td>190 (55)</td>
<td>149 (43)</td>
<td>8 (2)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School councils were the most frequently mentioned activity reflecting the school’s philosophy to personalised learning but was not the most frequent new initiative introduced specifically in response to the personalised learning agenda; this was mentoring.

Secondary schools were significantly more likely to suggest mentoring and counselling as reflecting their school’s philosophy towards personalised learning and primary schools were significantly less likely to suggest advice and guidance. No differences
between types of school were noted on the provision of pupil clubs, school councils or the focus given to personalised learning in PSHE.

4. PERSONALISED LEARNING APPROACHES IN THIRTEEN SCHOOLS

4.1 BIRLEY SPA PRIMARY SCHOOL, SHEFFIELD

Background data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school and age range</th>
<th>Pupils</th>
<th>Attainment (including VA)</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community School 3-11</td>
<td>Number: 504</td>
<td>Aggregate score across three core subjects of % attaining level 4 or above in KS2 tests, over last 4 years: 289, 287, 285, 293</td>
<td>% authorised absence: 6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FSM: 30%</td>
<td>Value added measure: KS1-2 =101.3</td>
<td>% unauthorised absence: 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EAL: 0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SEN: 15%</td>
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</table>

Birley Spa primary school has a very small number of pupils from ethnic minority groups though none is recorded as having English as an additional language. Thirty per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals which is above the national average.

Evidence base

Documentation: School Strategic Plan, Pupils’ newsletters, policies on phonics, reading, governor links to school, Managed Assessment Portfolio System, observation sheets, tracking sheets.

Observation: Reading Recovery, Reading Partners, Senior Leadership Team Meetings, ICT lesson, Writing Lesson

Interviews: Head, four teachers, SENCO, assessment coordinator, school council members, governor, learning mentor, Year 4 pupils.

Strong features of personalised learning

At Birley Spa, the approach to personalised learning is characterised by an emphasis on effective pupil tracking, pupil involvement and strong policies on inclusion, all of which the head attributes to the *Every Child Matters* agenda. The combination of systems for tracking with the explicitly promoted and shared ethos of placing the needs of each individual child at the centre of any policy, initiative, planning or thinking serves as a powerful model for personalised learning.

Leadership: There is evidence of a strong shared ethos led by the headteacher with clear educational vision.

A learning community: many staff are research-active pursuing higher degrees. Staff autonomy and the professionalism of teachers through real professional development is a strong factor in enabling personalisation.
Learning Mentor: The learning mentor has a wide brief encompassing all aspects of the emotional well-being of the children and plays a key role in terms of personalisation, defining her job as ‘removing barriers to learning’. She is also involved in the transition process.

The ‘Job Squad’: The job squad was set up to promote citizenship. Many roles in the school, for example, older children listening to younger children read, are undertaken by pupils who have to prepare a written application for the job. Each job has an adult ‘mentor’ drawn from the staff and all jobs involve initial training. Pupils take on a particular job for a term. The strengths are reported by staff to be about responsibility and taking responsibility for the school. The first group targeted were those children finding playtimes before & after school difficult which are times when many of these jobs are performed. For a number of children, having a job to do at playtime became a positive experience. Those undertaking the role of reading partners were observed at lunchtime where 15 children were helping younger children who needed support with their reading. This had been carefully set up, each older child being provided with detailed planning for his or her partner, individual record keeping was meticulously detailed and purpose-led, practically useful and used. The extent of involvement and engagement from both older job-squad volunteers and younger tutees was impressive.

Tracking: Every child had his or her own specific targets which, while embracing overall lesson objectives, were derived from the daily marking of each pupils’ own work. Formal tracking systems were observed to be highly developed, including the Managed Assessment Portfolio System (MAPS), the Reading Recovery recording, the Foundation Stage observation procedures and the literacy target-setting.

4.2 PARK ROAD JUNIOR, INFANT AND NURSERY SCHOOL, BATLEY, KIRKLEES

Background Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school and age range</th>
<th>Pupils</th>
<th>Attainment (including VA)</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Community School 3-11       | Number : 248  
FSM: 35%  
EAL: 48%  
SEN: 25% | Aggregate score across three core subjects of % attaining level 4 or above in KS2 tests, over last 4 years: 219, 172, 181, 233  
Value added measure KS1-2: 101.7 | % authorised absence: 4.9%  
% unauthorised absence: 1.7% |

The school has a 70 per cent Asian Muslim population. It is a mainstream primary school with designated provision for pupils with hearing impairment.

Evidence base
Documents: The ABC programme (Awareness, Balance and Concentration), Ofsted report 2006, tracking sheets, SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning Programme) lesson plan
Observations: Two pupils working with Learning Mentor on making a film, playground, Circle Time, SEAL lesson, BIP session, lesson for hearing impaired pupils, Year 1 maths using computers
Interviews: Head, School Council pupils, SENCO, 4 teachers following sessions observed

**Strong features of personalised learning**
The school’s particular strengths in personalised learning are wide-ranging but include assessment for learning where classroom practices on questioning, self assessment and recording of achievement are innovative. There is a strong commitment to pupil-led learning and they have adopted a positive behaviour policy that has involved moving from a focus on behaviour to a focus on learning.

Leadership: Staff saw the headteacher’s role as strongly supporting personalised learning through clarity of vision which was well communicated to staff.

Scaling up specialist provision into personalised provision: The specific challenges of integrating pupils with hearing impairment and a high proportion of pupils for whom English is a second language, has promoted development of personalised learning, built on specialist provision. For example, the Awareness, Balance and Concentration (ABC) programme was developed by one of the teachers at the school though since has been adopted by many others. It started for the pupils with hearing impairments but has now been adopted by the whole school as an approach to multisensory teaching. The researcher observed examples of work demonstrating progress in terms of concentration from pupils who had been doing the ABC programme.

Behaviour policy focuses on learning: The school changed the language that they use to talk about learning rather than behaviour. This was adopted consistently throughout the staff, and was reflected in their expectations, in terms of learning. Senior managers reported that it had a great impact on outcomes reducing incidents of poor behaviour and creating a much calmer atmosphere.

Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) group: the SEAL group work targets those pupils who have been identified as having a specific emotional and/or behavioural need to work with their peers who act as role models. The aims include self motivation, self awareness and being pupil led.

Lunchtimes/Playground: At lunchtime, each year group has their own jobs. Year 6 tries to facilitate communication, talking on the table. Year 5 takes the infants down to the playground when they have finished eating, Year 4’s responsibility is to clear the tables and Year 3’s is to clear underneath the tables. There is a wide range of activities including ten-pin bowling, dressing up, rounders, wrestling with figures and during the observation, all pupils were engaged. Every activity was mixed in terms of gender and age; every activity was self-organised and harmonious and in Key Stage 2 was supervised by only three play-workers, two of who were teaching assistants.

Assessment for learning/Self and peer assessment: Record keeping is extensive and success celebrated. The children decide what constitutes a good piece of learning. Children respond to their own learning using three categories - ‘Great I got it’, ‘It was OK’ or ‘I need more help’. This varies in style across the school to match learner needs but always reflects the learning objective. Children are given the opportunity to go back and change their response when they feel they have ‘Got it’.

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4.3 WIMBORNE JUNIOR SCHOOL, SOUTHSEA, PORTSMOUTH

**Background Data**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community School 7-11 mixed</td>
<td>Number: 313 FSM: 11% EAL: 4% SEN: 17.6%</td>
<td>Aggregate score across three core subjects of % attaining level 4 or above in KS2 tests, over last 4 years: 238, 245, 258, 260 Value added measure KS1-2: 100.2</td>
<td>% authorised absence: 4.6% % unauthorised absence: 0.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six per cent of the pupils are from ethnic minority groups and the socio-economic characteristics of the school are broadly average with the national picture.

**Evidence Base**

Documentary evidence: pupils’ homework sheets, children’s survey for school improvement plan and the plan itself, pupils’ survey on what makes learning fun, DVD of head explaining pupil choice at school to parents

Observations: 3 lessons and 2 school council sessions

Interviews: Head, deputy head, parent/governor, teacher, 3 groups of Year 5 pupils & school council

**Strong features of personalised learning**

Wimborne's approach to personalised learning was inspired by the good practice observed in another school (Wroxham, another case study) and is a model of how transfer of practice can be effectively managed.

Assessment for learning/pupil choice: At every opportunity, children choose the level they would prefer to work at depending on their perception of their own understanding of the concepts or tasks involved. This has the immediate benefit that they are reflecting lesson by lesson on their work and making choices about how to progress with it. It also negates the need to label children according to ability since the same child may be on ‘back to basics’ work in one lesson, ‘consolidate’ in another and ‘challenge’ work in the next and vary between subjects. Concerns that pupils might always choose the easiest work was not borne out by staff, parents or pupils’ comments. The Year 5 teacher reported that pupils question the teacher and other pupils as well as themselves more. The relationship between teacher and children has changed, according to the teachers, into a closer one in which the teacher facilitates.

School and class councils: Two years ago class councils were set up which meet once a fortnight, go through the minutes of the last school council meeting and children can write suggestions and ideas that get looked at during that meeting. This broadens the pupil involvement beyond the council members. The council in this school address key issues. For example, they changed the school rules after discussion about why they
had rules and what rules were needed - pupils feel the rules are theirs because they have written them. Children come to staff meetings and talk to staff on the same level. The observations of the two class council sessions together with interviews with school council members confirmed these points. For example, at the meeting on the School Improvement Plan, the pupil chairing the meeting explained the sections of the school improvement plan and how these related to the five outcomes from *Every Child Matters* to those present. The researcher observed that the children seemed remarkably articulate about what they are doing and why they are doing it.

Pupils as governors: The parent/governor interviewed reported that following some training on becoming active governors, three pupils had come along to tell the governors how they collected suggestions from all the classes and how they wanted to find out what made learning fun for them. They presented their suggestions as short term, long term and 'not really possible' scenarios. In September (2006), they became proper associate governor members and stayed for the whole meeting. The governor interviewed stated that before having met them [he/she] would have said that just following the meetings would have been difficult, but actually the pupils do better at that than some of the other governors.

**4.4 WROXHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL, POTTERS BAR, HERTFORDSHIRE**

**Background Data**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Type of school and age range</th>
<th>Pupils</th>
<th>Attainment (including VA)</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Foundation school 4-11 Mixed | Number: 238  
FSM: 6.3%  
EAL: 4.6%  
SEN: 12.8% | Aggregate score across three core subjects of % attaining level 4 or above in KS2 tests, over last 4 years: 210, 262, 252, 286  
Value added measure KS1-2: 103.2 | % authorised absence: 4.9%  
% unauthorised absence: 0.05% |

The pupils are predominantly White and English is their first language. The school was in special measures in 2002 but was described by Ofsted in February 2006 as outstanding.

**Evidence Base**

Documentation: Ofsted report 2006, school's policy statement on ‘Raising Standards through Assessment for Learning’, 6 sample pupil reports with one parental response. Interviews: Head, Deputy Head, Advanced Skills Teacher, Teacher, School’s Attached Researcher, group of pupils, Site Manager, Parents, a visiting performer, Observations: 3 lessons & whole school performance of ‘Stomp’, pupil-led morning for their parents on the way they learned and were taught

**Strong features of personalised learning**

Clear vision from leadership: The philosophy of the senior managers of the school drive the school’s approach to personalised learning. Their view of personalised learning is that it involves embedding a value system that reflects a belief in people’s
capability and promotes mutual respect, into the core of the school’s work. This is clearly articulated, regularly reviewed and revised in response to feedback.

Strong focus on learning/curricular flexibility: The school has focused on developing children’s thinking about themselves as learners, emotional literacy in terms of learning and skills needed for lifelong learning. Given its history of special measures, but also given its educational philosophy centring round very high expectations, the school is naturally concerned with issues of attainment. In 2004, the Year 6 pupils became very stressed before the tests so the children were taken off timetable for the whole week. For example they planned gardens, they costed them using spreadsheets, they found out all the information about how they could construct them, they did the design, used the PowerPoint to present to the whole school and voted for the garden design that they wanted. They actually built the gardens as a family learning project, getting parents involved and the traffic safety officer drove the digger. The leadership decision to take them off timetable for a week was seen as courageous by the staff. It gave a clear message that the child’s learning is important, reflected the strong clear vision articulated by the senior management and contributed in the staff’s view, to raising standards.

Writing club: A teacher reported that the writing club which takes place in the evening, is open to any pupils is not a ‘booster’ session but for any pupil who wants to write. A member of staff interviewed gave examples of individual pupils who had benefited in terms of writing, vocabulary and self confidence.

Assessment for learning: Self assessment is a strong feature of the work. Teachers reported that children have self-assessment books and write in them. The pupils were convinced that when they write their self assessment comments on their work, the teacher takes these into account when they then do their next bit of planning. The teachers gave examples of feedback from pupils on specific topics such as fractions, which had informed their decisions about whether more time needed to be focused on that topic.

Tracking individuals’ learning: Pupils’ levels are recorded on the computerised tracker system and the senior managers expect two thirds of a level of progress per child for 80 per cent of the class. The assessment data are interrogated around individual children and what might be happening with their learning. The management, teachers and support staff meet to comment on anything that’s unexpected - for example, children that are exceeding expectations - and look at the kind of interventions that might be taking place. This is linked to the learning review day interviews and the parent consultations. The staff listen to what the children are saying and the analysis is positive - what has supported learning, rather than taking a deficit approach.

Cohesion of vision: There is a strong clear vision of high expectation in the school articulated regularly by the senior management and this appears to be the overall key to success. The school is a learning community in which staff development is prioritised: Virtually all the teaching assistants are doing foundation degrees.
4.5 MILLOM SCHOOL, MILLOM, CUMBRIA

Background Data

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<th>Attainment (including VA)</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Community comprehensive 11-18 mixed Specialist: Technology, Arts</td>
<td>Number: 746 FSM: 10% EAL: &lt;1% SEN: 10%</td>
<td>GCSE 5 A-Cs 03-06: 57, 54, 54, 49 Value added measures: KS2-KS4 = 970.0 KS3-KS4 = 988</td>
<td>authorised absence 5.9% unauthorised absence 0.4%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Fewer than one per cent of pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The town is a former mining area with extensive part-time employment. The major barriers to achievement are low aspirations of parents and pupils and the negative experience that parents had of their own schooling which affects their current views about their son or daughter’s schooling.

Evidence Base


Observations: Tour of school with two pupils, two lessons, one special needs support small group session.

Interviews: head, deputy, assistant head, Directors of special needs, student welfare, guidance, enrichment, Network Centre Manager, two teachers, two learning mentors, two teaching assistants, head of administrative staff, four pupils designated gifted and talented, five pupils undertaking work-related learning.

Strong features of personalised learning

Flexible curricular arrangements: Every term the curriculum is suspended for a week and ‘out of the box’ teaching activities are provided across the school. Each department takes responsibility for devising activities that are as motivating and exciting as possible to enhance learning for a vertical group (mixed age) of pupils. This has uncovered pupils’ ‘hidden talents’ and been very popular with pupils though noted to be creative but demanding by staff.

The provision that has been developed on work-related learning is a strong feature of personalised learning. It is a cocktail of provision rather than just work experience for Years 10 and 11, though a few pupils start these arrangements in Year 9. It includes extended placements throughout the year, for 1-3 days per week, some offering additional qualifications. Outside agencies have contributed to the development of greater diversity of provision including such organisations as Millennium Volunteers and Barrow Youth Inclusion Project. These initiatives were reported by staff to have had an impact on numbers of pupils going into training but were also regarded as contributing to an overall culture of high expectation. The sixth form increased from 72 in 2003 to 83 in 2006. A new Network Centre is being developed on the Millom School site which brings together the different agencies providing services from preschool through to adult education and work-based learning. This will involve extensive partnership with local industry as some will be based on site.

Gifted and talented provision: Curricular enrichment is provided through after-school activities, individual music lessons, debating, visits, advice and support. Some acceleration is offered (in English and Modern Foreign Languages) including 20 per
cent of pupils (not just those identified as gifted and talented), took Key Stage 3 science tests a year early and achieved levels 6 or 7. Based on prior attainment and identification by the primary schools, ten per cent of pupils are designated for gifted and talented provision. Last year, some of these pupils attended a national conference where one of them gave a keynote speech. This work has extended the views of the pupils as to what is possible. The pupils interviewed confirmed this. In a mathematics lesson observed, pupils were working in small groups and one group of three that included two pupils designated gifted and talented asked if they could try a different approach to the task, and this was encouraged.

School organisation: The extensive workforce remodelling which has been undertaken in order to sharpen the focus on teaching and learning includes the integration of the pastoral and academic staffing, the employment of staff who are not teachers in key managerial and supporting learning roles and the role of administrative staff as described elsewhere in this report. Learning mentors work very closely with the local community which has increased attendance and reduced exclusions.

School Council: the school council designed a new school day and are involved in developing the strategic plan for the school which is reported on in section 6.4 of this report.

4.6 NORTH DONCASTER TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE, DONCASTER

Background Data

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<tr>
<td>Community comprehensive 11-18 Mixed</td>
<td>Number: 1359</td>
<td>GCSE 5 A-Cs 03-06: 30, 34, 35, 41</td>
<td>authorised absence: 8.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specialist: Technology</td>
<td>FSM: 25%</td>
<td>Value added measures: KS2-KS4 =963</td>
<td>unauthorised absence: 1.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAL: 0%</td>
<td>KS3-KS4 = 988</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN: 15.2%</td>
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North Doncaster Technology College serves a former coal-mining community. While the proportion eligible for free school meals is only just above average, long-term unemployment and other indicators, place the main ward from which the pupils are drawn as amongst the most economically and socially deprived in England. Around three per cent of pupils come from Asian ethnic minority backgrounds.

Evidence Base

Documentation: Computer Remote Access documentation, Science resources DVD, NDTC News - the College’s magazine - Summer 2006

Observation: 2 lessons

Interviews: Headteacher, senior management team, personalised learning coordinator, enrichment coordinator, IT chief technician, IT technician, Year 9 pupils, Interactive Learning Development Team, Head of Science, Head of ICT, Head of Geography, 2 teachers.

ICT links between home and school: The pupils can access all lessons on a CD as described elsewhere in this report. This is undertaken by two technicians who work
closely with teachers to produce resources to support learning. At the end of the year, the pupils get a permanent record of all lessons that have been taught throughout that year on CD.

Interactive lessons: Use of multimedia presentations that encouraged high levels of interaction were popular amongst the pupils. A Year 9 pupil commented that they had been composing music on the computer and made up their own orchestra. The pupils also suggested that interactive whiteboards encouraged teachers to get the pupils more involved in the lessons, which means more learning takes place and it is more enjoyable.

Pupil run TV: The pupils run a television station on the internet called AliveTV.co.uk. It is supposed to service the population around Doncaster, although visitors from Australia and New Zealand watch rugby union games filmed in the town. It is staffed by pupils from all over Doncaster, not just North Doncaster College. The programmes are made by pupils, filmed by pupils on a voluntary basis. In order to do this, they attend school for three hours in the evening and weekends.

Beyond the school: The school runs summer schools, Easter schools, weekend clubs and a range of activities that parents are encouraged to attend. The staff reported that personalised learning had broken down a lot of barriers to learning and built up partnerships with the parent becoming more involved in the learning process with the child, through using the computer facilities both at school, and where available, at home.

4.7 OATHALL COMMUNITY COLLEGE, HAYWARDS HEATH, WEST SUSSEX

Background data

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<td>Community comprehensive 11-16 mixed</td>
<td>Number: 1343</td>
<td>GCSE 5 A-Cs 03-06:71, 75, 68, 66</td>
<td>authorised absence: 5.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specialist: Science &amp; visual arts</td>
<td>FSM: 5%</td>
<td>Value added measures: KS2-KS4 = 997.0</td>
<td>unauthorised absence: 0.3%</td>
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<td>EAL: &lt;1%</td>
<td>KS3-KS4 = 985.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SEN: 17%</td>
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</table>

Oathall Community College has pupils who are mostly white and British. It is a specialist college for science and arts and has a designated teacher who leads on research. It also has a ‘Researcher in Residence’ who has been recruited part-time from a local university to encourage staff and pupils to engage in small scale research within school, funded by the Innovation Unit.

Evidence Base

Documentary Analysis: Oathall’s policy statement on personalised learning, two sample Individual Educational Plans, student council documents, outline pupil support structure, the first Oathall Research Unit Newsletter.

Observation: One lesson observation

Interviews: Head, Assistant Head, Curriculum Deputy Head, Year 9 pupils, Student Council Link Teacher, Teachers responsible for Assessment for Learning and Inclusion.
Strong features of personalised learning

Assessment for Learning: Assessment for learning features very strongly in the school’s policy statement and there is outstanding practice in some areas. Universal implementation across the school is patchy partly reflecting the challenge of establishing a shared understanding of, and commitment to, genuine pupil dialogue within formative assessment. Peer assessment and target setting are particularly strong and a senior manager noted that the learning review day that takes place annually, introduced three years ago, enables every pupil to have a personal conversation with their tutor and parent, to review progress and identify future targets.

Student council members were rather more positive about the value of the review day process than about target setting per se, perhaps because the review day provided protected time to engage in proper discussion.

Pupil voice: Pupils’ leadership skills are encouraged throughout the school’s activities. For example, some pupils are involved in the United Nations General Assembly project which promotes the voice of young people, others lead in areas of the curriculum, on the school farm and the junior sports’ leader award. Pupil voice in general, and the school council in particular, is a strong feature of the school and a highly significant factor in the approach taken to personalised learning. Particularly impressive is the speed with which the council has been transformed from a passively consultative body, to an active and central force for change. In the space of two years, for example, the school council has carried through a pupil-led initiative that is about teaching and learning on which all pupils have been consulted and which has been built into a school development plan, with committed action by all staff based on all the points that the pupils considered to be important. Pupil representation on the governors has just begun. The pupils’ own accounts differed very little in emphasis from their teachers and strongly supported the reality of an ethos of genuine pupil consultation.

Curricular flexibility: For Oathall, personalising learning through extending the curriculum and reconciling these aims with the public’s perception of it as a highly successful school, causes tensions. At key stage 4, an NVQ in Agriculture and Horticulture was introduced relating to working on the farm but the expectation of parents was that all pupils did GCSEs as well, since the GCSE results were an indicator of the school’s reputation affecting subsequent intake. This attitude had to be challenged, because introducing NVQs, entry level and other accreditation and qualifications were regarded by staff as a means of enhancing the self-esteem of those pupils unlikely to attain high grades at GCSE. Specialist school status has enabled expansion of enrichment activities, for example, Master Classes for pupils in the primary school moving up to Oathall as well as for current pupils. The school is attempting to get every pupil on an accredited course so that they can show that they have progressed. Staff expressed concern about how the school can demonstrate outcomes from work on life skills, noting that attendance can be a useful measure, but improvements in self-esteem, determination and motivation tend to be seen as subjective.

Learning mentors: The two learning mentors are an excellent example of how workforce remodelling has helped the school achieve a flexible approach that plays to the strengths of its staff and furthers some very precisely identified aims in terms of personalised learning. They have set up the Learning Zone in which they run a small group for pupils at the end of Year 10 who are not making progress. The pupil, learning mentor, parent and head of year all sign that they are committed to this pupil attending the Learning Zone. It personalises learning by giving pupils greater control over their own learning in a ‘safe’ environment.
Cohesion across activities: The school is involved in a large number of initiatives - specialist school, training school, research unit in school and previously a Beacon School. This is seen as both a problem and a lever. The school appears to run these effectively alongside one another by having a clear and coherent vision that ensures that overriding priorities remain clear throughout the range of activities. Funding associated with specialist school status was acknowledged to have resourced a great deal of work on personalised learning.

4.8 PRESTON MANOR HIGH SCHOOL, WEMBLEY, BRENT

Background Data

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<th>Pupils</th>
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<th>Attendance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist: science</td>
<td>Number: 1405</td>
<td>GCSE 5 A-Cs 03-06: 65, 66, 70, 71 Value added measures: KS2KS4=1021.2 KS3-KS4=1001.4</td>
<td>authorised absence: 5.2% unauthorised absence: 0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSM: 22% EAL: 74% SEN: 7%</td>
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The pupils are from ethnically diverse backgrounds including two thirds Asian and one fifth Black Caribbean and African.

Evidence base

Documentary evidence: Literacy intervention programme schedule, lesson observation feedback sheet, worksheets from French lesson observation, brochures for the Music Technology suite, Control Technology workshops and Diploma in Digital Applications. Preston Manor City Learning Centre News, City Learning Centre Inset programme and Preston Manor Prospectus

Observations: Black Boys Group session, four lessons, English Literacy Intervention, Gifted and Talented Latin Group, Language and SEN individual work.

Interviews: Head, Deputy Head, senior management team, Personalised Learning Co-ordinator, Data co-ordinator, Literacy Interventions Co-ordinator, School Council, Head of maths and Head of English

Strong features of personalised learning

Preston Manor is a school that is acutely aware of the pupils that it caters for and the precise context within which it is working. It responds to its own conditions in a remarkably thorough way, from a wide range of different perspectives and through a raft of different interventions, every individual's particular needs are likely to be addressed. The school has derived its approach from Hargreaves' work reviewed in the first section of this report. They commented on it as an intelligent model based upon deep and reflective research.

Black Boys’ Groups: The school identified Black Boys as a disenfranchised group and decided to address this through a weekly meeting of Black Boys in each year group. The Year 10 Black Boys Group is making a film to show all the parents. In the other
year groups, the Black Boys are using the meetings as a ‘talking shop’ but it is
targeted at all Black boys not just those identified as low achievers.

Mentoring: The mentoring programme is quite extensive and involves 120 Year 12 and
13 pupils as mentors. The mentors have to apply, be interviewed, show that they are
suitable and pass a test. The lead learning mentor in the school organises pairing up
and training by Community Service Volunteers. Then they are paired with pupils
identified as needing support and there is a whole training programme of what they do
when they mentor. The mentees are identified by their form tutors, directors of pupil
development, heads of year and sometimes by themselves. The mentoring can be
focused on self esteem; not working hard enough, friendship or other issues but it was
reported to impact positively on their education.

Emotional literacy: In the past, the school had had a spate of girls cutting themselves
or harming themselves. A group was set up for girls who might be at risk of cutting
themselves. The girls found this acceptable, did not feel stigmatised because of the
established culture of groups within the school, for example, for children who find it
difficult to make friends and the incidents of self harm were reduced. The school has
resourced provision for children with speech and language difficulties, mainly
Aspergers, which has established a culture of looking at innovative ways of growing
confidence and communication skills.

Pupil voice/school council: Year councils meet every two weeks and the school council
meets every month. The pupils were trained to observe lessons, for example, focusing
on how the teacher spends time with boys or girls or the proportion of negative to
positive comments. It was reported by staff to give teachers another perspective on
how the lesson is being run and the pupils see the lessons in a way that teachers
haven’t seen them. There is a separate website devoted to the school council which is
constructed by the pupils themselves. They are planning to do an online notice board
so that if pupils don’t want to raise an issue in class, they can do so online.

Personalisation through effective use of ICT: Preston Manor is the City Learning
Centre which means it is a resource on ICT for all the schools in the area. The focus is
on creative ways of unlocking the curriculum through ICT. The school has its own radio
station which broadcasts online at lunchtime. A different group do their show each day.

The staff reported that the radio station was highly motivating and having positive
outcomes. For example, they described one pupil as not only progressing and being
part of the radio club from the beginning, but also one of the key trainers for training
teachers how to make radio drama.

Literacy Intervention: The biggest initiative in the school is the literacy interventions
and the literacy programme in response to the needs of the 70 per cent of pupils who
have English as an additional language. A specialist English teacher works with
groups of children who are withdrawn for half term periods. The year group is blocked
into two halves with four classes in each half. An extra class is created in each block
and in Years 8, 9, and 10 children are removed according to the national curriculum
levels. So for half a term the English department will work with pupils at level 4,
withdrawing them from the four existing classes into a fifth class. That teacher will work
on the curriculum but will also be focussing on specific literacy skills according to that
group’s needs. After the half term, those pupils go back to their home class and pupils
at level 7 are taken out. In the knowledge of the coverage in English, pupils might
come out when they are reading a text or studying a novel so they work on that,
following the same curriculum as the rest of the class. The strength of the intervention
programme is that the groups are very small enabling the teacher to spend quality individual time with a small group of pupils.

4.9 ARBOUR VALE SPECIAL SCHOOL, SLOUGH

Background Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school and age range</th>
<th>Pupils</th>
<th>Attainment (including VA)</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special school 2-19 for all types of learning difficulties, physical &amp; sensory impairments &amp; behaviour</td>
<td>Number: 228 (including 50 post 16) FSM: 34% EAL: 50% SEN: 100%</td>
<td>Attainment last 4 years: no pupils entered for 5 GCSE but entry levels &amp; ASDAN⁹ are accredited Value added measure: KS2-KS4 = 999.9 KS3-KS4 = 1011.1 (based on teacher assessment)</td>
<td>% authorised absence: 9.2% % unauthorised absence: 0.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Arbour Vale has Sports College status. Nearly half the pupils are from ethnic minority groups, mostly from Pakistan. The school is in an area of social deprivation.

Evidence Base
Documentary evidence: Ofsted report 2003, prospectus, 14-19 curriculum, transition policy, example individual target sheet, example annual review pupil reflections
Observations: Problem-solving activity with Years 10-11
Interviews: Head, Lead Teacher Inclusive Learning, Lead Teacher Personalised Learning/Deputy Head, Team Leader Post 16, parent governor, 5 Year 10 pupils

Strong features of personalised learning
Curricular flexibility: There is a strong focus on skills for learning, not for content that is pursued through a strong emphasis on life skills and communication. The school offers individualised curricular pathways that are particularly well developed in Key Stage 4 and 5. At post 16, pupils are offered a personalised ‘college’ model, which has subsequently been rolled out further down the school. Key Stage 4 options are linked to its Sports College status and accreditation is offered in all courses through ASDAN or other schemes. The school offers gifted and talented provision in Sports and Art and ten pupils succeeded in GCSE Art in 2006. A range of after-school clubs are offered including Arabic and girls-only swimming and computer groups to increase the take up of these activities amongst girls.

Emotional Literacy: At Key Stage 2 the SEAL structure is used with the result that attendance and behaviour have improved across the school.

The Learning School: Staff commented that they had never been in a school that offered so much staff development. They have had input on personalised learning and

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⁹ ASDAN is a curriculum development organisation and an internationally recognised awarding body, which grew out of research work at the University of the West of England in the 1980s. ASDAN offers a wide range of curriculum programmes and qualifications for all abilities, mainly in the 11-25 age group.
the teaching assistants’ contracts incorporate time for them to be included in the staff development and subsequent time for planning with teachers.

Parent partnership: The parent governor suggested that the school was very strong on relationships with parents. Parents are supported through referrals to other agencies made on their behalf, availability of staff to talk to when needed, e-mail contact and reviews of pupil progress. Workshops are run at the school for parents, for example, on post 16 provision and presentations have been made to governors on personalised learning. The parent reported that his/her son/daughter had developed skills in music and sports that were subjects he/she didn’t like previously and in which he/she had refused to participate. The parent commented that lots of pupils have made remarkable progress, it is a positive happy atmosphere and that the school succeeded in making pupils feel good about themselves.

Links with the community: The school has strong links with the Asian-based community in Slough. Work experience opportunities are very well developed. Some children attend other schools for particular subjects in Key Stage 4 and 5. Business Education Partnerships are well established. The school is trialling pupils travelling with support on public transport instead of taxis.

4.10 TURNSHAWS SPECIAL SCHOOL, KIRKBURTON, KIRKLEES

Background data

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school and age range</th>
<th>Pupils</th>
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<th>Attendance</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special school 2-19 for severe learning difficulties with physical and sensory disabilities</td>
<td>Number: 51 EAL: 6% SEN: 100%</td>
<td>No entries to tests</td>
<td>% authorised absence: 17.2% % unauthorised absence: 0.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eight pupils are from ethnic minority groups, three of whom have English as an Additional Language. The school amalgamated (September 2006) with Highfields School in Huddersfield to form a new school on the site of Newsome Junior and High Schools. The case study was selected partly to consider how a new school might be planned taking into account personalised learning from the outset.

Evidence Base
Documentary evidence: School prospectus, Integrated Learning Plan, materials for supporting communication skills, reading books, individual pupils’ files with progress documented.
Observation: Reception class lesson
Interviews: Acting Head, Deputy Head, Incoming Head of new amalgamated school, teacher, two pupils from student council

Strong features of personalised learning
Integrated Learning: The individualised curricula are structured to provide integrated learning. Targets are identified in each domain contributed by the relevant professional
in order to develop a consistent response across the child’s timetable. Pupils are offered choice in activities through presentation of alternatives and being invited to communicate their choice (through gestures, symbols or signing).

Feedback on teaching and learning: Each child has a video that is produced and updated by the reprographics department working with the child documenting their progress through school. Along with photographs, these are used both to help the child assess their own learning and to provide feedback to the teacher on their teaching.

School Council: The grammar school collected £500 for Turnshaws School. The school council decided that they wanted to spend it immediately rather than waiting so they could use it for a piece of equipment for the new school. They agreed to allocate an amount to each class to be spent on an outing such as bowling or meal in a restaurant, with each class making its own decision. Staff reported that it was difficult to get feedback from the school council meetings because of the pupils’ limited communication skills. This was confirmed in the interview with the students in which responses were to the interviewer describing activities that the council had undertaken.

Parent partnership: Home-school books provide a daily record of activities and events between home and school. In addition, teachers visit the home to discuss the integrated package, particularly if parents cannot get to the school (which has a very wide catchment area).

Plans for the new school: Both the incoming head and the current acting deputy who will be Assistant Head in the new school, described the opportunities that a new school provides for planning for personalised learning. This has been considered in terms of organisation of pupil groups, staffing structures which will include multi-professional teams, curriculum and buildings and equipment. Space and outside areas will be designed to be more flexible with fencing and/or rails that can be added. Every classroom will have access to outside areas. Specialist teaching assistants will work with the pupils in the Autistic provision.

Links with the community will be enhanced through being nearer town facilities. Closer proximity to the mainstream schools creates the potential for greater curricular flexibility (through shared provision), work experience which sometimes leads to recruitment of teaching assistants and improved access for outreach work, of which this school does a great deal.
THE 3 CASE STUDY SCHOOLS IN THE SUFFOLK PYRAMID:

4.11 BENHALL ST MARY’S PRIMARY SCHOOL, SAXMUNDHAM, SUFFOLK

Background Data

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<tr>
<th>Type of school and age range</th>
<th>Pupils</th>
<th>Attainment</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
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</table>
| Voluntary controlled primary for pupils 5-8 | Number: 34  
FSM: 9%  
EAL: 3%  
SEN: 16% | Aggregate score across three core subjects of % attaining level 2 or above in KS1 test: 265 | % authorised absence: 4.8%  
% unauthorised absence: 0.6% |

The pupil population is almost entirely White, British, with no pupils for whom English is an Additional Language. It is in an isolated rural village just outside Saxmundham, near the East coast of Suffolk. It can be described as experiencing rural deprivation nearly a quarter of the pupils having free school meal entitlement which is above the national average. It feeds Saxmundham Middle School and with Leiston High School - the three schools in this pyramid work closely together.

Evidence base

Documentary evidence: Ofsted report 2002
Interviews: head, teacher, teaching assistant, four pupils
Observations: two lessons

Strong features of personalised learning

Pupil voice & choice: Staff were committed to giving children a voice to express their opinions which then enables them to make choices. The school offers choices in the areas of behaviour and links having a voice in a community with responsibility.

Philosophy in lessons: A distinctive feature of the personalised learning work in the school is through their involvement in ‘Philosophy for Children’ (Fisher, 2003). An example of the Year 3 and 4 lesson observed on this work was described in detail earlier in this report. In Years 1 and 2 the lesson was also observed and although not explicitly a ‘philosophy session’ many of the principles were evident. In this class the children were asked to choose their favourite seaside scene from 3 offered pictures and to generate questions from this. There was more teacher input in this session than in the Year 1-2 but still the ideas were mostly suggested by pupils.

Effective teaching and learning: One strategy used is ‘Mantle of the Expert’ where the teacher has to trust groups of children to work collaboratively on a project as ‘experts’ over a period of time. The interviewer raised the issue of teachers often allowing able, well-behaved children to do these types of tasks but finding it more difficult with lower attaining or less motivated pupils but the teacher disagreed suggesting that if the pupils are really interested, it works.
4.12 SAXMUNDHAM MIDDLE SCHOOL (DEEMED SECONDARY), SAXMUNDHAM, SUFFOLK

Background Data

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<th>Attendance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County middle school (deemed secondary) with pupils aged 9-13</td>
<td>Number: 307 FSM: 23% EAL: 1% SEN: 17.7%</td>
<td>Aggregate score across three core subjects 03-06: 230; 205; 226; 225. Value added measure: 99.3</td>
<td>% authorised absence: 5.3% % unauthorised absence: 0.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pupils are almost entirely White, British, in the rural town of Saxmundham, near the East coast of Suffolk. The school can be described as experiencing rural deprivation, with higher than average unemployment in the area. It receives pupils from Benhall St Mary primary school and feeds Leiston High School.

Evidence Base

Documentary evidence: Ofsted inspection report 2004
Observations: five lessons
Interviews: head, lead teacher on personalised learning, four subject teachers, four Key Stage 2 pupils and four Key Stage 3 pupils.

Strong features of personalised learning

Assessment for learning: Evidence of assessment for learning was both observed and reported in interviews. In the Year 7 geography lesson, learning objectives and success criteria were displayed on the interactive whiteboard and reviewed at the end of the lesson. In a Year 5 science lesson, the teacher observed that one pupil had quickly accomplished the task set so gave her an extra challenge (to draw her graphs using Excel). In interview, the humanities teacher described how he marked and added comments to work then invited pupils to add their own, along the lines: ‘Did they think our comments were fair? What could be done to improve?’ Test marks are given back to pupils and the teacher then works through the test with them.

Curriculum entitlement and choice: A major focus is on curriculum entitlement, choice and enrichment. A variety of approaches is taken including two days off timetable at the beginning and end of term, using learning challenge strategy materials, an ‘Excellence and Enjoyment’ activities week in the Spring term and a summer week focused on the outdoor environment, provide opportunities for sustained cross curricular learning in blocks of time. Teachers reported that this provides them with the opportunity to teach to their areas of interest and excellence and to plan together in a collegial way.

But such integrated and collaborative work is not confined to these special days and weeks when the normal timetable is suspended. The approach is also found in ‘open ended learning challenges’ within the normal curriculum. The example described elsewhere in this report illustrates this through a project linking science and ICT to set up an horticultural business.
Pupil voice: This is clearly valued and promoted in the school, especially through the school council. Both teachers and pupils spoke in praise of this and catalogued a series of achievements: choosing new football shirts and new house names; deciding on equipment for the play barn; fundraising; amending the disability policy; proposing a new dinner system; taking responsibility for recycling of mobile phones.

Transfer across the 3 schools in the pyramid
There was evidence of significant working across the pyramid. It was the proactive approach of the head of the primary school who had been leading the group of heads towards developing an overall ‘philosophy’ for personalised learning. She had arranged a pyramid day for the heads in September 2005, when Robert Fisher was invited to talk about his approach to the development of thinking skills. The schools actively worked together to smooth transitions for pupils from primary to middle and middle to high school through joint activity particularly in the sphere of sports and music to establish greater curricular continuity.

4.13 LEISTON HIGH SCHOOL, LEISTON, SUFFOLK

Background Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school and age range</th>
<th>Pupils</th>
<th>Attainment (including VA)</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community comprehensive 13-18 mixed specialist: technology</td>
<td>Number: 653 FSM: 7% EAL: &lt;1% SEN: 3%</td>
<td>GCSE % 5 A-Cs 03-06: 53, 55, 64, 60 Value added measures: KS2-KS4=1014.8 KS3-KS4=988.9</td>
<td>% authorised absence: 6.3% % unauthorised absence: 2.1%</td>
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</table>

Leiston High School is situated in the small town of Leiston, on the East coast of Suffolk. Thirty-three per cent of adults in the area have no formal qualifications and there is a major skills shortage. Many of the school’s parents attended the school themselves and some have a negative attitude to school in general.

Evidence Base
Documentary evidence: Ofsted report 2003
Observations: Two lessons
Interviews; Head, Assistant Head, Advanced Skills Teacher responsible for Leading Edge work, three heads of department, two groups of Year 9 pupils and three Year 12 pupils on an A level course

Strong features of personalised learning
Curriculum choice and alternative pathways: There is a strong focus on the particular needs of older pupils where curriculum choice and alternative pathways are more relevant. The school has tried to develop programmes for the more disaffected or those pupils who are more likely to become the NEETs and therefore in danger of being lost to the school system altogether. The head was particularly proud of the school’s record of achievement for all pupils, in that very few pupils leave with no
qualifications (in 2005 100 per cent achieved at least 1 GCSE and 97 per cent 5 or more).

A head of department argued that within the vocational courses there was more choice in terms of not only what pupils do, but also how they do it. As a teacher, this needs a change of approach often with the pupils themselves determining the nature of the discussions and how lessons went. He commented that teachers had to give up control. He made a similar point about coursework as a form of assessment – that there was also a ‘control aspect’ in resistance to this too. In the Business A-Level he felt the balance of assessment in terms of exams and portfolio to be about right; the pupils themselves agreed that their portfolio of work was something they felt proud of and could be taken to an interview either at college or work. The Year 12 pupils, interviewed at the same time, agreed that they were more engaged with business studies and its different approach.

Post 16: At post-16 level, the range of options for pupils was even greater and there is complete open-access in Key Stage 5. While few pupils get ‘lost’ in the school system it has little control over what happens once they leave for college. The numbers in Key Stage 5 are high for the comparative size of the rest of the school. The head mentioned specialist diplomas (e.g. Health & Social care, Leisure and Tourism, Business), LINK courses and a new Level 1 course in school aimed at potential NEETs who will not travel to Lowestoft or Ipswich.

Transfer across the pyramid
Senior staff from the high school are invited to take part in staff appointments in at least one of the middle schools. Pupils from the middle school visit the high school particularly in Year 8 and staff from the middle schools have collaborated on teaching and learning initiatives designed to contribute to personalised learning. For example, in their Leading Edge projects they were developing and sharing a new range of visual computer-based learning strategies designed to enhance extended writing skills, targeting support at disaffected pupils and developing a consistent approach to using and understanding data. Together with Saxmundham Middle School, they were developing and sharing the use of prior data as a means of helping students, teachers and parents to understand how to set realistic targets for selected students. Other aspects of the personalised learning at Leiston such as their work on assessment for learning and the student council are covered elsewhere in this report.
5. CONSTRAINTS AND FACILITATORS IN DEVELOPING PERSONALISED LEARNING

Predictably, funding, time and resources were often seen as major constraints to implementing any initiative though these were raised less in the case studies than in the survey responses. Decisions about allocation of funding and time involve prioritisation, so the findings in relation to constraints need considering alongside those on prioritisation. There was little evidence of case study schools having secured additional resources for the developments they were pursuing although most mentioned that more money and time would help. They seemed to be ‘doing things differently’ rather than ‘doing more’. Only 17 schools surveyed claimed that not knowing what personalised learning was a constraint to implementing it. Most case study schools acknowledged the lack of one definition but felt that this did not present a major constraint.

Funding/Budget

The data were collected prior to the recent funding allocation to schools for personalised learning, which amounts to a total of £990m by 2007-08. Eighty schools that responded to the survey (more primary than secondary or special schools) specifically mentioned funding or budgetary constraints in developing personalised learning. Fewer primary than secondary schools gave high priority to personalised learning but it is difficult to extract whether this was because of lack of funding or whether they allocated less to it as a consequence of not prioritising it.

Time

Lack of time was raised as an issue by 76 schools in the survey. This included staff time, curriculum time and management time. Like funding, the issue of time is a reflection of priority given to personalised learning within the school, and there were no significant differences between the types of schools raising this. One case study school suggested that personalised learning approaches had been used to bring together previously disparate initiatives and had, in this way, reduced time constraints.

Testing

National Curriculum tests and Ofsted inspection were each mentioned as constraints to implementing personalised learning by fewer than 15 schools in the survey. These were usually stated to be in conflict with personalised learning in that they were reported to narrow the focus of the school curriculum and teaching approaches.

Number of pupils in the school

Some of the primary schools that responded in the survey raised the small size of their schools and consequent need for staff to have multiple responsibilities as a constraint:

*We will have four teachers in Sept 1-Foundation Stage, 1-Key Stage 1 and 2 –Key Stage 2. The demands on staff in a small school are enormous but we remain committed, for our pupils, to continue to develop personalised learning.* (Questionnaire, primary)

*As a small rural school with only four teachers all initiatives need to be taken slowly and incrementally because all teachers are responsible for many...*
aspects of a schools work apart from their class teaching responsibilities
(Questionnaire, primary)

Rural context and small school make it difficult to provide the breadth of
opportunities needed to personalise the curriculum (Questionnaire, primary)

Thirteen schools in the survey raised the issue of class sizes or adult-pupil ratios as a
constraint to the development of personalised learning. One secondary school noted:

Class size is pivotal – as group size becomes larger personalised learning
becomes very difficult (Questionnaire, secondary)

However, some schools suggested that their smaller size facilitated the development
of personalised learning by enabling closer contact between pupils, staff and parents:

In a small village school all children have, to a greater degree, elements of
personalised learning because of the class sizes. The school is extremely
flexible in its teaching arrangements and knows its pupils and parents very
well. (Questionnaire, primary)

and

I think in a school of this size (about 450 in Years 9 – 11) you can actually
do a remarkable amount of personalised learning because the staff know
the children as individuals so they are likely to be able to treat them much
more as individuals. (Secondary case study interview, middle manager)

Therefore it would appear that if participation is key to personalised learning, the size
of class will be relevant, since very large classes make the monitoring of pupil
engagement by the teacher more challenging.

Lack of space or lack of flexible use of space

A few schools suggested that buildings were a constraint. One primary school in the
survey noted:

We are a very small school with a lack of space. We greatly value the learning
environment and will be having an extension to the premises in the coming
year. (Questionnaire, primary)

One secondary case study noted that the buildings were old and some not fit for
purpose:

Building Schools for the Future’ has little meaning at present and nor does re-
fitting the school for real ‘personalisation. There are no social bases in the
school and it is not a comfortable or pleasant environment to be in. (Secondary
school case study interview, senior manager)

Others noted the developments in this area as an opportunity:

As a school involved in ‘Building Schools for the Future’ the transformation of
the curriculum is paramount. This initiative is driving the personalised learning
agenda beyond the philosophy and practice into buildings that will enable it to
flourish. (Questionnaire, secondary)
Initiative Overload

The case study schools tended to see any new ideas or changing emphasis in national policy as an opportunity and try to find a way to make it support existing and future priorities identified in the school. In these schools, personalised learning was central to the ethos and articulated as such, they found it a powerful and energising concept. Nine schools in the survey indicated that personalised learning was just one more initiative to fit in and that the overload was a huge constraint:

Yet another initiative!
LEA is helpful/supportive, however, numerous government departments, DfES, National College of School Leadership, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority etc are telling us what we should be doing – staff are simply fed up so useful initiatives as I believe personalised learning could be, become lost/diluted.
(Questionnaire, primary)

Lack of flexibility elsewhere in the system

A few case study schools gave examples of ways in which initiatives that they wanted to take in developing personalised learning were constrained by the limitations in the flexibility of other institutions or provision. For example, one special school in the survey reported attempts to provide a more appropriate curriculum for pupils in Key Stage 4:

Lack of available places at local high school for options
Lack of vocational courses with minimum written content – practical focus e.g. woodwork/cookery
Lack of work experience placements of pupils’ choices e.g. metal work/metal engraving (Questionnaire, special)

Many schools saw the agenda as moving to a more flexible and creative curriculum - involving pupils in taking greater responsibility for their own learning and supported by much more flexible staffing arrangements.

6. THEMES EMERGING FROM THE FINDINGS

6.1 Personalised Learning for All Schools

It is possible that some of the initiatives and themes addressed by this research and by personalised learning approaches themselves, had more resonance with secondary and special schools than with primary schools or PRUs. For example, the provision of ‘alternative pathways’ really has no meaning for younger children. The aim of the research was to explore the manner in which schools were interpreting personalised learning but this necessarily assumes that all schools will have engaged with the concept of personalised learning. Some schools’ responses to the questionnaire suggested that this may not be the case and if so, it is unlikely that these schools will give priority to filling in a questionnaire which asks them to define their views of personalised learning and the manner in which they have attempted to implement the construct.

A view was expressed by some of the case study schools and those surveyed that personalised learning is about secondary school policies such as broadening GCSE options, providing a wider range of work experiences and vocational education. There was also a view that the personalised learning agenda was derived from the special
needs agenda reflected in the emphasis given to meeting individual needs, individual target setting, tracking and alternative accreditation systems. The links with the ‘Every Child Matters’ agenda strengthened this view:

Most of the aspects of personalised learning are a feature of special education in that pupils have to have very personalised learning curriculum. (Questionnaire, special)

As a special school for youngsters with severe/profound learning difficulties, our entire ethos is concerned with personalised learning. It is our jobs to cover the individual needs, strengths, preferences of all children and then provide an appropriate curriculum and individualised timetable, within the context of ECM. (Questionnaire, special)

As a PRU we have always had a large element of personalised learning to try and re-engage our pupils in learning. Every pupil is complex and has diverse needs (Questionnaire, PRU)

Personalised learning may be seen as a means of addressing special needs or addressing problems and in this sense more relevant to ‘specialised’ provision:

We regard all our pupils as being in need of personalised learning as they have usually had a negative school experience. (Questionnaire, special)

6.2 Personalised Learning for All Pupils

In most case study schools, specific groups of pupils were being targeted but often this was perceived to be to ensure that all pupils make good progress. However, a concern was expressed, that the activities encouraged by personalised learning approaches, are targeted at low attainers and pupils identified for gifted and talented provision, leaving a group of pupils in the ‘middle’ whose needs might receive less attention.

Personalisation is much easier for high and low ability pupils but it is much more difficult to provide it for the pupils in the middle. (Secondary school case study interview, senior manager)

Schools in the survey were asked to identify the pupils, if any, that the school specifically targeted with personalised learning initiatives.
Figure 8: Which pupils, if any, has your school specifically targeted with personalised learning initiatives?

Note: Some schools targeted more than one group

Both primary and secondary schools reported directing their attention to pupils at the top and bottom of the ability range. In addition, only a relatively small percentage of each type of school claimed to be targeting personalised learning approaches at no particular groups. This has potential implications for the inclusivity of the implementation of the personalised learning policy.

Only some of the schools who responded in the survey had significant groups of EAL or ethnic minority pupils and the data do not enable responses on this question to be linked to the characteristics of schools. Several of the case study schools had high proportions of ethnic minority pupils and saw this as an important area in which provision needed to be personalised for their local community:

*You’ll notice that we’re about 70 per cent Asian Muslim, 30 per cent indigenous white. So to recognise that fact, we obviously have a number of Muslim support staff within the school. You’ll see bilingual signs around the school which personalises the environment for pupils.* (Primary case study interview, senior manager)

Clear differences as to which pupils were likely to be targeted emerged between the phases/types of school who responded in the survey, though these results should be interpreted with caution: disaffected pupils were more likely to be targeted in secondary schools and PRUs and gifted and talented pupils more likely to be targeted in secondary schools.

There were varied messages from schools about whether personalised learning is an approach aimed at particular groups of pupils.

*LA allocates on a formula basis based on underachievement in Term 2. As a selective school very little funding is available for personalised learning. This*
implies that personalisation is not for all, but for lower achievers only.
(Questionnaire, secondary)

This school is referring to how the funding for personalised learning is allocated: 50 per cent on low prior attainment, 35 per cent weighting for deprivation and 15 per cent on total pupil numbers. The White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All* targeted specific groups of pupils in its commitment to future funding. Thus, the resources are targeted at supporting intervention for pupils who have ‘fallen behind’ in English and mathematics, those identified as likely to benefit from gifted and talented provision and enabling pupils from deprived backgrounds access to after school and year round activities. Arguably, developing greater inclusivity involves targeting resources to those making least progress and the case study schools seemed to embrace this ethos.

In some case study schools, personalised learning initiatives which initially focused on one group of pupils, were subsequently developed for all pupils in the school.

**Park Road Junior: Developing personalised learning for all from specialised provision for the few**

In Park Road Junior School in Batley, West Yorkshire, the focus that the challenges of being a resourced school for pupils with hearing impairment has promoted, may paradoxically have resulted in a clearer vision of personalised learning for all. The work on personalised learning here for all pupils is built very largely on the foundation of the thought and work that has gone into specialist provision. The curriculum and teaching approaches are highly influenced by the resourced provision developed for a small number of pupils. A specialised movement and coordination programme is offered across the whole school, having initially developed it for the pupils with identified special educational needs. They have noted that it assists concentration, confidence and performance.

A few schools in the survey suggested that personalised learning was less relevant for pupils with problems outside school. For example:

> Personalised learning will only ever have a limited impact on pupils in schools in deprived areas unless there is more support for their families too. We have found that the children for whom this personalised learning has little effect are those with ‘problems’ at home. (Questionnaire, primary)

This seems to imply a view of personalised learning as being focused on learning in classrooms, whereas many schools see two of the areas of personalised learning, ‘school organisation’ and ‘partnership beyond the school’, as the vehicles of support to families. In the survey responses, several primary schools mentioned ‘Family SEAL’ (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning Programme) with great enthusiasm, claiming children had made greater progress since the school had introduced this approach. Furthermore, at least half the case studies included positive examples of ways in which the school interacted with parents and the local community to address difficulties that might be barriers to learning.
6.3 Individualised Learning within Personalised Learning

There is considerable evidence in both the case studies and survey that ‘personalised’ was often interpreted as ‘individualised’, either in the description of provision made (for example: individual curricular pathways, individual timetables, special arrangements for work experience or accreditation) or in explicit use of the term ‘individual’ or ‘individualised’ in responses given to questions. In the middle school case study for example, the focus on the individual was referred to by staff and pupils.

In the two special school case studies, frequent reference was made both to ‘individualisation’ and to their own history in establishing practices that meet individual needs:

_We have an established individualised curriculum and timetable for post 16 which we now need to spread down the school._ (Special school case study interview, senior manager)

In the survey responses, a primary school wrote that:

_We always do our best to provide opportunities for individual children but time / staffing means it is difficult to cater for each individually all the time – it has to be manageable._ (Questionnaire, primary)

As Johnson (2004) noted, focusing on individual needs will increase pressure on the teacher, limited resources and the school overall. It encourages support to be directed exclusively at individual children rather than at supporting the teacher to create effective pedagogy for the whole class. Strategies that personalise through, for example, ensuring that prior experience of pupils is drawn on in lessons, increases pupil participation, without assuming individualisation, and therefore may be more realistic. The power of personalised learning is in its potential to recognise the ‘personal’ in teaching, learning and schooling so that all pupils experience and are motivated by a sense of belonging and view the learning as relevant to them. This can happen equally in whole class, small group settings or on a one-to-one basis, which provides targeted support when needed. Most pupils will need a combination of these arrangements to maximise their learning.

6.4 The centrality of pupil voice and participation

School councils were reported in the survey to be a popular initiative in all types of schools, with over 80 per cent of primary, secondary and special schools reporting having established a council, with some very positive examples of real change being achieved. Pupils at a secondary case study school gave several examples of real change brought about through the council:

_You have rules of the school – like do not do this and do not... but they were like two bits of A4 size, 12 font, really long and people didn’t read them. So now they’ve changed them to one sheet which has got five [values] which are all to do with respect...[that came about] from the school council. They started talking about it last year...but they’ve got round to doing it completely this year after help....We just said – ‘what is the one thing that students give towards other students and the teachers and everyone else in the school?’ And we all basically said ‘respect’.....That everyone should be treated fairly and have the respect of everyone else._ (Secondary case study interview, Year 9 pupils)
However, the existence of a council need not be related to the level of pupil participation in decision-making. Many recognise a serious rhetoric/reality gap on whether school councils are encouraged to address core issues that really matter and whether the decisions made by councils are actually implemented:

Need to develop role of school council here – has mainly focused on ‘social’ issues (Questionnaire, secondary)

and

We have had a school council for five years – it is involved in e.g. senior staff appointments but is not yet sufficiently empowered in other ways. (Questionnaire, secondary)

There were no significant differences on school council activities between phase of school in the survey, though only one third of Pupil Referral Units in the survey had a council, perhaps because of a smaller and more transient pupil population, making ‘representation’ less crucial and more challenging.

From the survey, it appeared that giving pupils a real ‘voice’ in their learning and in how their school is run, is usually done by the school council or class/individual discussion with an adult. However, some secondary schools were experimenting with more radical approaches such as having pupil representatives at senior management and governor meetings or using pupils as lesson observers to report on assessment for learning initiatives:

Students are involved in teaching appointments. They observe candidates teaching and give feedback. Students are on the governing body. Last year we were concerned that there was too much messing about between lessons, queuing at lunchtimes, less effective lessons in the afternoons, so we asked them to design a new school day with the constraints of 30 teaching periods, etc. They came up with a shortened day, staggered lunchtime and this has now been implemented with beneficial outcomes. (Secondary school case study interview, senior manager)

The case study schools tended to show high levels of commitment to pupil participation and autonomy but, as has been noted in other research (e.g. Fielding, 2004b) there are examples of staff attitudes acting as a barrier:

Very few staff see teaching and learning as about developing autonomy – though very able, most see it as delivering a prescribed curriculum (Questionnaire, primary)

In other cases, this was acknowledged as a challenge but seen as potentially overcome by effective teacher training/staff development:

The biggest challenges are to train teachers to educate pupils to be autonomous learners and to get away from timetable constraints to allow more flexibility in the curriculum (Questionnaire, secondary)

Communicating with parents about pupil voice and choice was critical in the case study schools since genuine commitment to pupil decision-making could cause discomfort:
6.5 Clarity of leadership and vision

Many of the factors that seem to facilitate progress in the case study schools are not specific to personalised learning, for example a strong focus on learning, effective staff development and successful leadership. For personalised learning which seemed to have multiple meanings across the school, a clearly articulated vision expressed consistently by the leaders and managers is particularly beneficial to progress. This was a strong characteristic of all the case study schools, although as with schools more generally, this vision did not always reside with the headteacher. A philosophy shared by staff and inspired by a strong head with clarity of educational vision was a feature of many of the case study schools. The heads recognised the need for staff to feel committed to the vision:

So I really feel passionately that people should have the courage to look and think, ‘How can I do this differently within my school?’ I think it’s very hard if you’re a lone teacher trying to work in that way. (Primary case study interview, senior manager)

Headteachers and senior managers in the case study schools seemed to be skilled in bringing coherence across the many different demands and priorities running simultaneously. They recognised that systems were helpful, but not helpful enough. Developing genuine commitment to personalised learning needed to involve everyone but could be modelled by the senior managers:

So you’ve got the same message going right through every level..... It’s got to be driven by something that’s a genuine desire, that everybody can do that much better. I think you do that in the way you behave, so I think there’s a lot of modelling of behaviour that goes on as well the systems - the tracking systems, the lesson observations, the departmental reviews, performance management; those are tools but what really matters is the way people use those tools. I think people have actually got to believe in [personalisation], they’ve got to want it, it’s got to matter. But also you’ve got to give people time and space. I think we also provide space for reflection, so there’s a genuine debate going on, a dialogue. (Secondary case study school interview, senior manager)

6.6 Personalised schooling as a context for personalised learning

The case studies in particular, suggested that some schools were orientating their personalised learning work strongly towards the needs of the local community. In one secondary case study school for example, the local community has a very high unemployment rate and the school has focussed the alternative pathways work strongly on maximising future employment for the pupils. In contrast, at another secondary case study school a major challenge was the need to change the culture of both staff and the parent/local community to accept that the demands have changed and the assumptions that everyone should pursue exclusively GCSEs are no longer appropriate. This is an illustration of the importance of the context of the school, the significance of reputation and the pressure to ‘maintain standards’.

In both these schools, the personalised learning approaches are being used to meet the needs of their pupils specifically, and those of the local community more generally.
In this sense, the policy can be seen to be establishing personalised schooling, within which personalised learning can flourish.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This report has attempted to describe what and how personalised learning approaches are contributing to effective schooling. These approaches are developing in the context of a national policy on personalised learning and a philosophy articulated in the literature. Much of the philosophy is presented in the language of emancipation, though the schools in the case studies had interpreted this into practice.

One contrast that has emerged from this work, relates to the established practice in public services of fitting individuals to the services offered, whereas all the case study schools had adopted approaches based on the premise of adapting the service to meet the needs of the pupils. Hargreaves (2006) reporting on his work with a large number of schools in the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, comments that public services have traditionally fitted the individual to the service rather than vice versa:

...it became clear that a new view of the learner was central to personalisation, namely that instead of expecting students to adapt to the pre-ordained structures, practices and routines of the school, these could all be questioned and if necessary adapted better to meet the needs of learners. Instead of students being expected to fit into the school, the school was being changed to fit the learning demands of students. (Hargreaves, 2006, p.16)

The policy context described at the start of this report makes clear that the system now has to develop and adapt in response to the needs of the users. It is driven by concerns that too many pupils are not achieving at their potential level, the range of services supporting them has been too fragmented in the past and the workforce is insufficiently and inappropriately skilled for the future global requirements. While philosophy and policy more usually inform practice, this research has provided the opportunity for practices in schools to enlighten future policy and perhaps subsequent philosophy.

The survey and case studies have provided a broad overview of some of the practices on personalised learning with some detailed examples of innovatory but accessible practice. There are many activities developing that, while not necessarily in direct response to the personalised learning agenda, are being legitimised, encouraged and supported by it. It should be acknowledged that many effective practices that emerge are those that might be expected from effective schools more generally, and have been highlighted repeatedly as such in the school improvement literature. So for example, effective use of data, schools as thinking and learning organisations (strong staff development characterised by reflective practice), high aspirations, clear well-articulated vision and strong leadership are all well established features of improving schools that have been identified in available research. Other activities appear to be more specific to supporting personalised learning, and these are used here to address the initial research questions.

7.1 What approaches are schools using to personalise learning for pupils?

Schools are using a very wide range of approaches to personalised learning. In both the case studies and the survey, some respondents wanted to make it clear that they
saw the personalised learning approaches as endorsing current activities or providing a means to further develop existing ones. In some of the examples described in this report, schools were using their personalised learning approaches to target specific interventions which were then developed more widely across the school. So for example, literacy interventions, programmes and support initially aimed at pupils with identified special educational needs and provision for gifted and talented pupils might be targeted at one group of pupils but then extended across the school.

The activities that were most likely to have been introduced specifically with the aim of personalising learning were reorganisation of support and administrative staff to enable them to take on more roles with individual or small groups of pupils and extending alternative pathways within curricular and work-related provision. Other frequently mentioned and observed new activities were cross-curricular work for short periods during which the usual curriculum did not apply, self and peer assessment (within assessment for learning initiatives), the use of learning styles and open-ended learning approaches, targeted interventions and much more focus on pupil autonomy and choice. The case study schools seemed generally to have developed activities that reflected greater involvement of the parents through review days and use of ICT for linking home to school. Some of the most effective practice related to meeting the needs of the local community by developing stronger links through learning mentors, work placements or bringing more of the community into the school. These seemed to lead to raising the aspirations in areas where these are relatively depressed and increasing work opportunities for school leavers.

7.2 How well do these approaches reflect the five key components?

The five key components of personalised learning were all evident in the case study schools though not usually with equal emphasis in the same school. The case study schools tended to have clear and well-articulated aims around all pupils' learning which they saw as facilitated by the five key components. Taking this further, assessment for learning and effective teaching and learning were often seen as means of achieving higher standards for all and better post school outcomes. But these were facilitated in many of the case study schools, by curriculum entitlement and choice, school organisation and beyond the school activities.

The most effective practices seemed to recognise and exploit the overlaps between the five areas, for example by creating greater curricular flexibility through relationships beyond the school. These schools maintained their central focus on learning while for example, restructuring staff or developing many external links and activities, rather than allowing these activities to become ends in themselves.

7.3 What are the key features of best practice in personalised learning that could be shared?

There was a wide range of effective practices that could be shared, mindful of the findings of Fielding et al. (2005), who noted the importance of the context in determining how effectively practice was transferred. Given the breadth of personalised learning approaches, many schools are likely to have some key features of practice in personalised learning worthy of sharing. These included aspects of assessment for learning and in particular pupils taking more responsibility for their own learning, 'genuine' pupil voice embedded across all five areas of personalised learning, links with the community and curricular flexibility. Curricular flexibility was linked in
primary schools to social and emotional literacy and in secondary and special schools to alternative pathways and work-related learning.

While some schools saw personalised learning as having developed from individualised approaches to provision for pupils with special educational needs, the special school case studies had extensive and well-established experience in workforce remodelling issues, in particular in teachers working as part of multi-professional teams. As Johnson (2004, p. 13) notes:

*Teachers are a minority of the staff of a special school. A large range of other staff support pupils, their disciplines varying with the specific needs of the individual pupils. All work together within teams in classrooms to meet the educational and care needs of each pupil, with different but complementary roles. Special school teachers, like many early years teachers who long ago learned to work with nursery nurses, are confident in the particular skills and knowledge they bring to work with children and relaxed about staff with other skills making complementary contributions in the classroom.*

In the mainstream case study schools, this multi-professional teamwork was still relatively under-developed, especially at classroom level. Often, restructuring of staff had involved integrating traditional pastoral and academic structures with special educational needs incorporated within them, but adults from a variety of backgrounds working in teams in classrooms was still a challenge in most cases. Hence, there is scope to share practice between special and mainstream schools in this area.

7.4 **Are there any aspects of personalising pupil’s learning where schools would value additional support?**

When asked what additional support was required, many case study schools mentioned resources, though interestingly the evidence suggested that lack of resources was not limiting their development. Neither was the lack of one formal definition of personalised learning restricting their work. More often, in both the survey and case study schools, competing interests were seen as limiting personalised learning approaches. So for example, developing a broader curriculum linked to accredited qualifications and work-related learning, might be in conflict with a more restricted view of ‘what counts’ and concerns that the school’s reputation would suffer if the focus is taken off the high stakes results. Schools sometimes successfully overcame this challenge by showing how broadening the curriculum re-engaged pupils who had become disaffected and who then went on to gain some core traditional qualifications as well as other more recently introduced ones. Further work at national level to ensure these approaches are supported through policy, continuing professional development opportunities and guidance would be welcomed.

7.5 **How are schools tailoring teaching and learning to meet the needs of specific groups of pupils (e.g., gifted and talented, minority ethnic pupils, low attaining)?**

Three issues arose in relation to schools tailoring their approaches to personalised learning to specific groups of pupils. The first concerned whether targeting resources at those identified as ‘falling behind’ and those identified as gifted and talented will raise standards across the pupil population. The intention is to narrow the attainment gap between highest and lowest achievers. Targeting gifted and talented pupils as well as those ‘falling behind’ recognises that narrowing the gap should not be achieved by
limiting the progress of the highest achievers. However, the evidence from the case study schools suggests that one consequence of this approach (and this was acknowledged by some of those interviewed) is that it could make the ‘invisible’ pupils, those in the middle attaining range, more vulnerable. Since pupil progress data are widely available (though relatively limited in parts of the special school sector), schools should be encouraged to test out this concern and to respond by retargeting resources if it is apparent.

The second issue to emerge from the case studies, was that schools with high proportions of ethnic minority pupils were likely to adopt what we have suggested is a ‘personalised schooling’ approach. This involves prioritising the needs of the local community through the personalised learning approaches in the school. For example, through building on existing relationships by recruiting teaching assistants from the local ethnic minority population and ensuring the school is accessible to families by providing multilingual signs around the school. In these ways, the school is both personalising the learning for ethnic minority pupils and reaching out to the local community.

The third issue to arise from both the case studies and the survey was that some schools identified personalised learning strategies as having developed from their previous practices for meeting the needs of pupils identified as SEN. Others were specifically resourced for particular groups of pupils (hearing impaired pupils for example) and had initially developed personalised programmes to meet their needs but then ‘scaled up’ these approaches across the school. Programmes focusing on movement and coordination, emotional and behavioural approaches and literacy skills were all examples which had been subject to this process.

Overall conclusions

Above all else, and not specific to personalised learning, the case study schools seem to have developed cohesion across areas of work so staff do not experience change as initiative overload or imposition. A clear vision, well and often articulated, is used to provide a cohesive approach that integrates initiatives and in the case of personalised learning integrates approaches across the five areas. Furthermore, the effective practice seen in schools suggested that they had developed a strong sense of ‘agency’, in that they valued pupils, staff and all those concerned with the school, facilitated their involvement and recognised their contributions.

Do personalised learning approaches offer anything new? The literature, case studies and survey suggest that schools which might be characterised as strong on personalised learning see learners as co-investors in education, not in the financial sense, but in terms of their aspirations and commitment to learning. They maintain the focus on learning and all other activities are seen as contributing to this. However, the learning on which they focus goes beyond the school to future employment, health and citizenship. It is exemplary in lifelong learning, by giving pupils the skills to learn and motivating them to succeed in their own interests and aspirations and hence in their own terms.

The effective practice in case study schools was characterised by a very high level of pupil engagement and participation - in the classroom lesson, in extra-curricular clubs and in work-related learning in the local community. Emphasising participation as the key to personalised learning is consistent with the effective practice that emerged in this study. To take a simple example practised in many schools, establishing prior knowledge at the start of lessons or new topics is one way of maximising participation
and providing a basis for future development. The Year 5 science teacher in one case study school did this simply by starting the lesson with a quiz presented in such a way that making mistakes is not a punishing experience. This does not require buildings, high levels of staffing or resources. It does require changing attitudes such that the pupils’ prior knowledge and experience is accepted as an essential starting point from which to progress, in order to ensure that learning, even when taking place in a group, is ‘personal’.
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